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JOE RUBINSTEIN

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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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#37

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rip tora but true

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cover contributed by:
SUNBOW PRODUCTIONS

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Art: Jim Salicrup

UP FRONT

Distributors. Who needs 'em?

Well, if you're a publisher, you've got to find a way to get your projects into the hands of the public — so you fall into the hands of the dreaded distributors. After all, things have changed since the days when a publisher could hand out newssheets in the village square.

Like so many things in life, there are good distributors and there are bad distributors. The former actually do what they can to give your publications a push, and they pay promptly. The latter often forget to even list your publications at all, and when any orders do accidentally come in, they also forget to pay you for years on end.

They know who they are. So does every publisher.

Distributors are, no doubt about it, a wily bunch who run their operations on "percentages" (another technical term). But, when all is said and done, business sometimes makes strange bedfellows, and a publisher without distributors is like, well, a distributor without publishers.

-Dave

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"We began to realize how weird we could

STEVE GERBER

Just when you thought animation was dead, something and someone came along to revive it. That something was G.I. JOE and that someone was Steve Gerber. Already famous for his comic-book work — he was even featured in the "Fast Forward" section of PLAYBOY which spotlights up-and-coming talents; true to character, the accompanying photo featured Steve going crazy behind a wire fence — Steve cut his animator's teeth and exhausted his mind as story editor for the DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS program (as you will read) before moving on to G.I. JOE and, once again, making history in a "kids" medium . . .

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *To start off with, when did you get involved with G.I. JOE?*

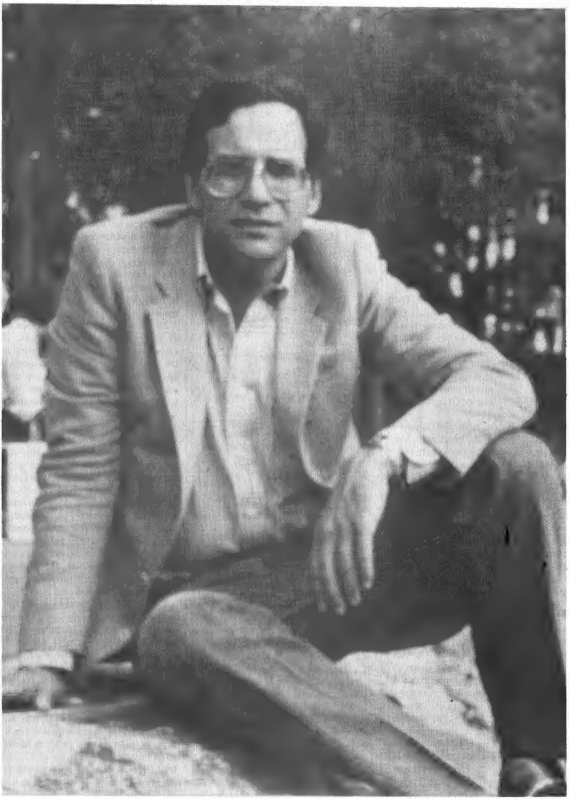
STEVE GERBER: That's an interesting story. Right after I had done DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS for Marvel Productions, story-edited that show, I made a vow to myself that I was never going to work for the networks doing animation again. The experience with D&D had been so painful — just in dealing with CBS — that I decided, you know, that no amount of money was worth it. No matter what, I was not going to work in animation for the networks again. I thought that that was the end of my animation career, because the networks were the only ones doing animation.

DWIGHT: *Well, you had done, what, a*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Steve Gerber
Born: 20 September 1947 — St. Louis
Occupation: Writer/Editor
Year Got Into Animation: 1978
Favorite Animated Feature: I don't have a favorite animated feature.
Favorite Animated TV Show: Honest to God, I really like G.I. JOE better than anything else.
What Would Most Like to Do to Marvel or DC: It's too late for that.

actually get with the G.I. JOE show."



"Could we add warmth to the scene where

little depiction of that experience for ECLIPSE Magazine?(Laughter.)

STEVE: Yes. The Betty Bibney Botkin story you're talking about — I wouldn't take it too literally, but yeah. That was a network censor. These were network executives that were the problem on this particular show, much more than the censors. I don't want to mention names, but basically my life was a living hell for the three or four months that I was working on that show. It exhausted me so completely and creatively that I was never happy with the show. It was okay, sometimes. The animation was nice on it, sometimes. I just felt that the show could have been a lot more than it was. I remember a discussion in one of the Marvel producer's offices over a speaker phone with the network people, and this fellow from the network saying things like, "Do we really have to have *so much* magic in this show?" And I was explaining to him, "See, it's sword and sorcery. The swords are the weapons that they use and the sorcery, that's the magic. You have to have magic for it to be sword and sorcery." I was involved in discussions like that with them all-of the time, and they would literally pick on *every single line* — not just dialogue — even the scene description! "Is it too violent? Would Bobby really do that? Could we add some warmth to this scene where the ogres are ripping apart the town?" *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Put smiles on their faces.*

STEVE: Yeah, right. Anything. Have them pet a dog while they're doing it. Who knows? It got to the point where it was completely absurd and I just did not want to work with them. So anyway, as I was saying, I figured that was the end of my career in animation. Well, a couple of months later what happens, I get two phone calls. One is from Lucasfilm. They were interested in having me work on the EWOKS AND DROIDS show and they hadn't decided at that point what they were going to do with that show, where it was going to be broadcast, whether it was going to be a network show or whether they were going to go with some sort of syndicated deal or whatever. And almost simultaneously I heard from Sunbow Productions about producing G.I. JOE. Apparently, someone out at Marvel had recommended me to them. And, ultimately, I turned down the Lucasfilm offer and took the offer to do G.I. JOE because there was no network, and I felt from talking to those people at Sunbow in New York that there was actually a chance that we could produce something good. That's how I got involved with it.

DWIGHT: *You were story editor, correct?*

STEVE: That's correct.

DWIGHT: *How much had been prepared for you, and also what sort of directions were you given?*

STEVE: Well, quite a bit had been established already. There was already a five-part mini-series, that had been on the air the year before, that had established most of the major characters. Of course, there were also all of the comic books and all of the biographical material written for the toys that, I think, **Larry Hama** had mostly done. So all of this stuff existed. When people were signed to write an episode they were handed what we called a briefing book, essentially all of the bios of all of the characters, pictures of all of these characters and the vehicles — the airplanes and the tanks and the ships and so on. They were given a looseleaf notebook with all of this material — it looked like the Manhattan phonebook. It was absolutely enormous. I'm story-editing TRANSFORMERS now and we've got another one like that. So, there was a great deal of raw material to work with already.

The question was how do you take all of those individual characters and, of course, with the whole tapestry woven in the mini-series, make it work as a bunch of individual episodes. The requirements are very, very different. It took a little while to figure all of that out. In the beginning what everyone wanted to do, the natural thing . . . my own first script for G.I. JOE was a Cobra-tries-to-conquer-the-world-and-the-Joes-stop-them script. We really quickly got away from that kind of story. It was the natural inclination to do something like that, first of all because it's the kinds of shows the networks would do all of the time and basically what everybody's experience is or was out here, and secondly because that was the way the mini-series was structured and that was the model that people were working from; therefore, we craft everything to conform to the model. Everyone assumed that.

It was only about, I would say, like four or five or maybe even six scripts into the series that we began to realize how weird we could actually get with that show. *(Laughter.)* And then once it started it couldn't be stopped. It got stranger and stranger right up until the end. The last script that I did for G.I. JOE — I wrote three of them altogether for the first season — the last story was a two-parter that bears virtually no resemblance in structure, in pacing, in tone, in everything, to the first script that I did.

DWIGHT: *It sounds like you were actually given a heck of a lot of freedom on how to determine things.*

the ogres are ripping apart the town?''

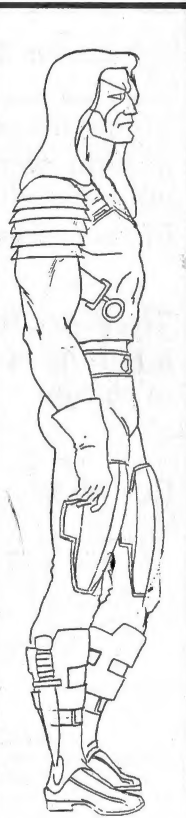
© 1986 Marvel Productions, Ltd

STEVE: God, yes. I am prouder of that show than of anything else I've done in animation! We were given an *immense* amount of freedom. I was working with possibly the single most intelligent producer I've ever dealt with. The guy's name is **Jay Baccall**. His actual title is creative director at Griffen-Baccall, which is the advertising agency of which Sunbow Productions is a subsidiary or a sister company or something. Jay is just incredibly sharp; a real good sense of drama, a real good sense of character, a wonderful sense of story, and a tremendous imagination — moreso, I think, than he realizes. Jay is perhaps the only producer I have ever heard actually say to a writer, ''Gee, are you sure this is weird enough?'' *(Laughter.)*

He felt exactly the same way about it that I did: I mean that we had to push people into new directions and into stretching their abilities in ways that they simply hadn't before. We developed, over a period of time as we were doing that show — we've been doing it on TRANSFORMERS this year, too — a way of sort of browbeating the writers. We would bring them in and use certain North Vietnamese techniques to kind of steer them away from the network style of writing. *(Laughter.)* ''No! You *don't* have to *make* everything audibly and visually redundant!'' The example I'm using for TRANSFORMERS, you know, is if you have fifty Decepticons flying out of the sky all lasers blazing and attacking Autobot City, nobody has to point up into the sky and say, ''Look! The Decepticons are attacking Autobot City!'' *(Laughter.)* Which is, again, the way that every single Saturday morning cartoon show is written.

DWIGHT: *It sounds similiar to a lot of Marvel and DC stories also.*

STEVE: Oh, sure. Yes. But we wanted to really move away from that. We were getting animation that was good enough that we felt we could take another step and write these things almost like feature films instead of prime time television or Saturday morning, and for the most part they are written that way. There were changes made in them by some of the producers at Marvel who were also, like, so thoroughly indoctrinated in the Saturday morning way of doing things that they didn't understand and so immediately just wanted to explain it in the most pedestrian way possible. There are moments like that in the show that I just absolutely cringe at. It couldn't be helped. I didn't have any control over that. But at the same time, the level of the writing on that show is so far superior to almost anything being done in animation any place at the moment.



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"The level of writing is pathetic."

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DWIGHT: *Well, when I talked with Buzz Dixon, he really credited you with any success that G.I. JOE had in '86 for the work that you did in setting everything up in '85.*

STEVE: Well, I would modify that somewhat to include **Jay Baccall**. Certainly, Jay and I were the driving forces behind the '85 series, and that did provide a model for Buzz to work from for '86. The fact that apparently Buzz carried it on very successfully in '86 . . . I mean, I know how hard it was to do in '85. From everything I've heard, Buzz's staff for '86 is just as good. I'm really pleased about that. I couldn't be happier.

DWIGHT: *You brought in a number of comic-book people on G.I. JOE. What was the reasoning behind that?*

STEVE: Well, there are a number of reasons. First of all, the level of writing in the animation field in L.A. is just not that good. I would go so far to say it is pathetic. I felt that we would gain a real advantage by using some people who were used to writing for print, used to actually seeing their words on a printed page, and who had therefore developed a certain amount of care about the way they put those words together. I was making a really concerted effort to raise the level of writing in the field, and so I went out and did get some of the better comic-book people to contribute to the show. I wanted a group of people, also, who didn't bring to the show the prejudices of Saturday morning, the training of Saturday morning. I wanted an entirely different consciousness working on the show — people who understood that a sympathetic character could also have a negative side, that a character could be more than one-dimensional, how to write a story that was motivated out of character as opposed to just a bunch of plot devices put together randomly and sometimes nonsensically, which is what you get on Saturday morning a lot. Most Saturday morning scripts are a collection of the network executives' own prejudices as to what makes a good script, and they have virtually nothing to do with the way a series or the way a character should be written.

DWIGHT: *Well, with G.I. JOE, itself, one of the reasons for its success is the fact that the characters have been fairly well defined.*

STEVE: Yes, they have — even in the comic book. The comic book is a lot better than people give it credit for. There is an assumption, you know, that because it's based on a toy and because it's written, I guess, with a slightly younger audience in mind, or an audience with a slightly different orientation, that it's dreck comics. It's not. It really isn't. That book is as good as anything else in the Marvel line, certainly, and probably better than a lot of them.

DWIGHT: *I think it's also part of that elitist reaction where if it's popular than it must be bad.*

STEVE: That's part of it.

DWIGHT: *What do you feel were the big successes that you were able to do in '85?*

STEVE: You mean in terms of the stories and such?

DWIGHT: *Yeah.*

STEVE: Well, the single biggest success was an episode that was written by **Stanley Ralph Ross** which is an absolutely merciless satire on Saturday morning television. It's an episode called "The Wrong Stuff" in which Cobra manages to disable all of Earth's communications satellites and then puts its own satellite up there and in effect takes over television, and you see Cobra's version of pro-social programming. This is by far the funniest and the strangest episode of the season. Cobra Commander has redone old movies, for example. He's changed the ending of KING KONG so that the last airplane comes up and King Kong swats it down. All the people flying the planes are dead and he's still up on top of the Empire State Building, pounding his chest and roaring, and **Carl Denham** and the cop or whoever are down at the foot of the Empire State Building, looking up, and the cop says to **Denham**, "Well, he got the airplanes." — and **Denham** says, "Yes. You can never win if your enemy

Look Sharp!

ALEC STEVENS

NORMAN DOG

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"I can't believe they allowed us to do this."

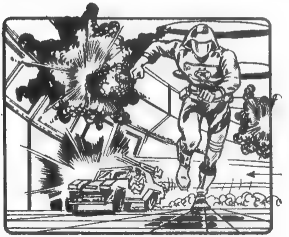
is bigger and stronger than you are." *(Laughter.)* Then, we did a segment of the show that was about 30 seconds of a Saturday morning cartoon series called THE LIKEABLES. They're little green elves, and the scene has two little green elves flanking a little purple elf, walking down the street of this little elftown, right, and the little purple elf is saying to the little green elves, "Gee, Likeables, how come nobody likes me?" — and the Likeables say, "Well, Purpie, it's because you're different."

DWIGHT: *Oh, noooo!*

STEVE: Yes. And then both of the little green elves pull out fistfuls of little green fairy dust and start flinging it at the purple elf and saying, "Only when everybody looks alike and acts alike and talks alike and thinks alike and never never gets angry about anything will we achieve world peace." *(Laughter.)* And at this point, of course, the purple elf has turned completely green, and he says, "You're right, Likeables! Now everyone will like me!" *(Laughter.)* And the announcer — I can't believe they allowed us to do this — then the announcer actually comes on and says, "Tune in again next week for more pro-social fun with the Likeables." *(Laughter.)* The scene goes completely black . . . and you pull back and you see that the Joes have been watching this, . . . and Duke has got this look on his face like an anvil has just been dropped on his head . . . and he just says, totally deadpan . . . "This has got to stop." *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *That's a riot!*

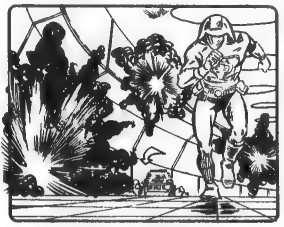
STEVE: Some very funny stuff in those shows. I am so proud of that series! There's another one we did called "The Games Master" that **Clint Dilly** wrote. It was essentially the big kids toys against the little kids toys. The Games Master is this guy who owns an island someplace off in the middle of some ocean somewhere, and he sort of looks like a cross between the Kingpin and Baby Huey, I guess. He's like a big, humongous sumo wrestler with the mind of a child, right, except that he's also sort of like an idiot savant. He's created this whole technological empire for himself that looks like Candyland. He's got rockets for defense, but they're like those little water rockets that you pop and then they fly into the sky. He's got an airforce that looks like Fisher-Price toys *(Laughter.)* . . . kinda brightly painted and round-ed edges, little bulbous airplanes flying through the sky with their little propellors



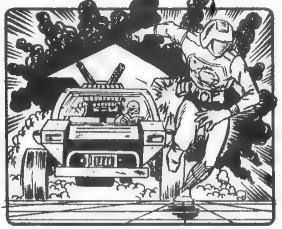
COBRA COMMANDER RUNS DOWN CORRIDOR WITH **EXPLOSIONS** GOING OFF IN BG ... CLUTCH SKIDS IN, JEEP **HITTING** WALL...

ANIMATING. FLOOR AND WALLS ⟶

A storyboard sequence from the G.I. JOE tv show.



LOSING **BACK,** STRAIGHTENING OUT.....



AND **ZOOMING** UP BEHIND THE COBRA COMMANDER....

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"I don't think the producers got the joke."

turning. What we did was take all of the Joe planes and send them against all of these little kids toys. It was one of the funnier battles of the whole series. There are about half-a-dozen of 'em like this.

There's a story that **Cristy Marx** did called "The Synthoid Conspiracy" in which the Joes are replaced by android duplicates of themselves, essentially, which is a real good story. There's one that **Buzz Dixon** did, a two-parter called "The Traitor" in which it appears, at least for awhile, that one of the Joes has sold out and gone over to Cobra because he needs money. His mother is desperately ill and Cobra offers him a certain amount of money to betray the Joes. And then there's this one story that unfortunately didn't turn out on film as anything special but that was one of the funniest ideas I have ever heard. In it's original form — had the script been done the way it was written, been produced the way it was written — it would have been one of the classic episodes. This is a story called "Red Rockets' Glare." It was written by **Mary Skrenes**, and the story involved a fast-food hamburger chain called Red Rocket Burgers. They were set up all across the country, and then were suddenly bought out by Extensive Enterprises, which was Xamot and Tomax's Cobra front, and nobody really had any idea what was going on. Roadblock's aunt and uncle bought into one of these franchises and decided they didn't want to sell out, and so all of a sudden they're being attacked by planes and jets and tanks and everything *(Laughter.)* . . . people who want this franchise for some reason, but they don't look like Cobras. They appear to be just some strange people who are trying to force them out of their hamburger stand. And ultimately it develops that the reason that all of these stands are being bought back is that they were constructed in a pattern all across the United States and each one has a little rocket symbol in front of it and the rockets are real. *(Laughter.)*

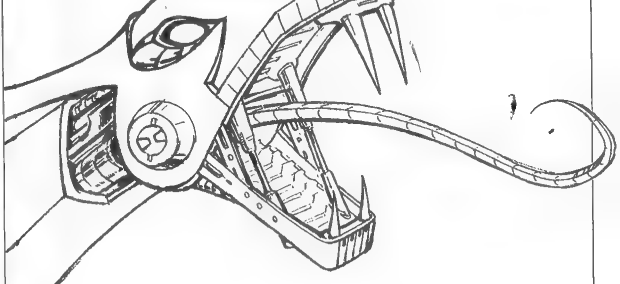
DWIGHT: *Oh, noooo!*

STEVE: Cobra has managed to set up an entire line of — we don't call them this — but they are essentially nuclear weapons aimed at every major city in the world, all disguised as hamburger stands. *(Laughter.)* It was a really beautiful script and a really, really funny idea. It was just destroyed in the execution of it. I don't think the porducers at Marvel got the joke.

DWIGHT: *Well, one of the criticisms the networks level against animation is that, it being for kids, kids won't understand all of these things.*

STEVE: I think that's a lot of hooey. I think the biggest problem — and this *will* be the end of my career in network animation by saying this — the real problem here is that the network executives don't understand it and don't want to be embarrassed. They don't want to have to say to somebody, "Explain this to me. I don't get it." — so what they say is it's too sophisticated for kids, meaning "I don't have to ask you intelligent questions about it." That's a very common thing out here, not just in animation and not just in television but in movies, too. The producers and the network executives and, God knows, the studio executives, just don't really grasp a lot of the subtler points of these things, and so they will say it's too sophisticated for the audience. That's absolute hooey. The audience will get it.

We've had no complaints from people saying that they don't understand the show. The fan letters on the show, some of which come from six-year-olds and some of which come from teenagers and even adults, they



Giant robot snake from the upcoming G.I. JOE movie.

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STEVE GERBER

"DC felt that no matter what Byrne did

STOP
START PAN
SFX
PAN ACROSS WARGAME TABLE (ITS SURFACE PANS COUNTER TO CAMERA MOVE, REVEALING COBRA FLAGS DOTTED OVER THE ENTIRE PLANET'S SURFACE.) UP TO COBRA COMMANDER, REVEALING THE ARCADE COBRA CONTROL CENTER BEHIND HIM....
COBRA COMMANDER: Nothing can stop Cobra.
CONT
COBRA SOLIDER:
What about

all love it, and they tend to love it on different levels, you know. These shows were really written the way the old Marvel comics used to be. They work on several different levels. The five-year-olds are seeing one thing and the adults are seeing something else entirely, or something else in addition. I don't expect a five-year-old to grasp, you know, the really fine points of some character bit that we do with Flint or Lady Jaye or something. I want him to understand sort of why Flint is doing the particular thing that he is doing, or why Lady Jaye feels the particular way that she does, you know, in a general way; but it isn't important that they grasp all of the implications of that. They understand enough to be able to follow the story, you know, and the adults watching it will get something much greater from it. That's fine.

DWIGHT: *G.I. JOE has really grown into this huge thing since you got involved with it. Now we're having this major feature to be released next season. How do you feel about the success... do you think it's really been a boon?*

STEVE: Well, a boon to what things?

DWIGHT: *Given animation for syndication a comparative footing with networks and helped improve animation overall?*

STEVE: It certainly has that. The audience levels for G.I. JOE are the equal of anything on Saturday morning animation. There's no question about that. G.I. JOE, of course, became ultimately the top-rated of the syndicated animated series — which was really gratifying to us because it's not the most popular toy. It's up there, someplace in the top five, but not the most popular toy line.

Has it been a boon to the general field of animation? It certainly hasn't hurt. I hope the feature is good. I don't know a great deal about it. Buzz has told me some things about it — he worked on it as a story consultant — and I haven't heard anything that sounds bad. I hope the feature is good and I think, if it is, it may do something for animated adventure films that hasn't been done in a long time.

DWIGHT: *Why did you leave as story editor of G.I. JOE?*

STEVE: Just because I felt I had done too many of them. There were 50 shows done for the season that I worked on. I had something to do with all 50 of them, and story-edited, myself, 36 or 37 of them. I just felt I wanted to leave it before I got stale. That's all. I felt that I had really done everything with it that I was capable of doing, at that point, and just felt it would be better off in the hands of somebody who was coming to it fresh.

DWIGHT: *In the vein of coming to it fresh, there was a rumor a while back that you and Frank Miller were going to be doing a revamp of Superman for DC, but instead DC went for the John Byrne version. Can you talk about that?*

STEVE: Oh, yeah. I'll tell you, I am kind of loathe to talk about that because I don't see how anybody can read it as anything but sour grapes. I don't want to say a great deal about it. I don't know how to approach this. Maybe if you ask me more specific questions about it I could deal with it.

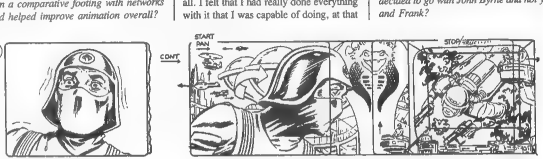
DWIGHT: *Have you read John Byrne's first issue?*

STEVE: Yes.

DWIGHT: *How does it compare to the sort of plan you and Frank Miller cooked up for Superman?*

STEVE: Ours wasn't dull! *(Laughter.)* See, if I start to criticize MAN OF STEEL then I wind up in a situation that I really don't want to be in.

DWIGHT: *Okay, then let me ask you another question — do you know why DC decided to go with John Byrne and not you and Frank?*



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with SUPERMAN he was gonna sell it."

STEVE: Oh, yes. We know exactly why. There were two things, actually. Back in the days when Frank and I submitted the proposal, DC still wanted to be "fair" about everything. They were going to hold what they called a giant Superman bake-off — so help me God, those were their words. . . *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Bake-off?*

STEVE: I'm not kidding. Exactly their words. They were going to solicit premises for a revamping of Superman from *everybody!* — just anybody who was possibly interested. Frank and I had already presented them with. . .

DWIGHT: *When was this, a year or so ago?*

STEVE: Longer than that. Probably closer to two years now. But, we had presented them with pretty much a sort of outline for the first year or so's worth of issues, you know. We planned what we would do with Luthor. We had created an entirely new Supergirl for the series who was not Superman's cousin and who, in fact, was not even born on Krypton or any fragment thereof. We had completely reworked. . . ours was actually a much more radical revamping of the thing than what **John Byrne** did. I think it was also a great deal more interesting, and I think it also retained a lot of the mythic qualities of the character that are completely missing from MAN OF STEEL.

DWIGHT: *Well, what were the two things that DC told you specifically?*

STEVE: Oh. Well, we pulled out the minute we heard about this bake-off idea. The other problem was that we wanted our 20% share of the Supergirl character and they wouldn't do it. Those were the two things, basically.

DWIGHT: *When you and Frank were working on the thing, did you talk with Jerry Siegel at all?*

STEVE: No, actually. I didn't. But Jerry and I had talked about Superman many, many times in the past, beginning at the time that the big appeal was made for him and for **Joe Shuster** when the SUPERMAN movie was announced, you know. Jerry and I know each other fairly well. It's been a couple of years since we've been able to sit down and have lunch — since the time we were working on "The Starling" and such together — but I consider Jerry a very good friend of mine. Back in the days when I was writing THE PHANTOM ZONE series for DC, I would think as I was writing it, you know, "How would **Jerry Siegel** handle this?" And most of the time I think I guessed right. Jerry told me he liked that series quite a bit. I have a great deal of respect for the man and for his work and for, particularly, of course, what he did with that character and the creation of that character. Strangely — since we're generations apart — there is enough kind of common vision there that I think I see the character very much the way he did, particularly in the beginning. My love for that character. . . This is why I can't talk about MAN OF STEEL! *(Laughter.)* I get so *emotional* about that character that it becomes difficult for me to restrain myself when discussing what was done to it.

DWIGHT: *Frank, I take it, would have been drawing it?*

STEVE: The way we had it planned, we were going to do all three of their books. I was going to do a revamping of Wonder Woman. Frank was going to do a revamping of Batman — what eventually became DARK KNIGHT, although it was somewhat different at that stage, because it was going to be a contemporary Batman rather than Batman at the end of his career. And we were both gonna do SUPERMAN. The idea was that Frank and I would write it.

DWIGHT: *Do you know why they chose John Byrne's version?*

STEVE: No. By this time I was long since out of it. The reason, obviously, is they wanted to get **Byrne** away from Marvel and they felt that he had a large enough following that no matter what he did with the book he was gonna sell it. *(Laughter.)* Really. I think it's that simple.

DWIGHT: *Let's talk now about HOWARD THE DUCK.*

STEVE: Okay.

NEXT MONTH: What's it like to meet Howard the Duck face to face? Steve visited the movie set and found out! A must read for hairless apes everywhere!

"Next year I have to fit Rocky Balboa

LARRY HAMA

Artist, editor, writer — Larry Hama's career in comics has led him along a very winding path, as you will discover. The main focus at the moment, of course, is on G.I. JOE, but Larry is much more than just a driving force behind one of the most successful comic-book series and toy lines in recent history. To get the full story, Jim Salicrup and I cornered Larry in his Marvel office and proceeded, against the chaotic background of noise there, to get the lowdown not just on G.I. JOE, but also Larry's views on comics, fans, and much more...

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *When Hasbro decided to come up with this updated version of G.I. JOE, how did you get involved with the whole thing?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Larry Hama
Born: 7 June 1949 — New York City
First Professional Comic-Book Sale: An eight-page horror story for HOUSE OF SECRETS or SECRETS OF THE SINISTER HOUSE. It was inked by Neal Adams.
Favorite Handgun: .45 Automatic Colt
Character Would Like to Work on: Dr. Doom
One Thing That Would Really Like A Chance At: Flying.

LARRY HAMA: There was a big meeting at Hasbro to discuss the project. It was attended by **Jim Shooter, Tom DeFalco, Archie Goodwin,** myself and, I believe, **Nelson Yomtov.** Basically, they had decided to switch from having a large single figure of Joe with a lot of accessories, going for smaller action figures. The big, really major difference was they wanted to give all of the guys characters and backgrounds, and they wanted to have a comic book. They wanted to have a back story. That's why Marvel was brought in right at the beginning. When we showed up they had basic designs for the figures. What they knew about these figures at the time was that one was a basic infantryman, one was a commando, one was a mortar, one was communications, one was a laser expert, and so on and so forth. We agreed to do dossi-

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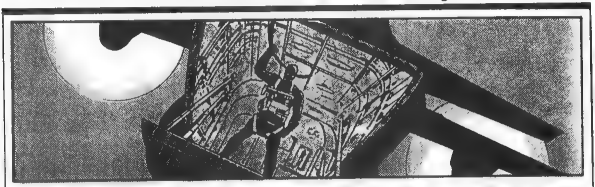
into the G.I. JOE continuity."

"I wanted to do a real story without



"Silent Interlude", from G.I. JOE #21. A silent story written and pencilled by Larry, finished by Steve Leialoha.

ers on each figure; to come up with the background and characterization and the way they would fit together as a team. The surprising thing for all of us was they hadn't even thought of doing a bad guy.

DWIGHT: *Cobra hadn't been invented at all?*

LARRY: No. As a matter of fact it was **Archie Goodwin**, I think, who threw out the name. All of us argued that these guys can't just march around and go on maneuvers or whatnot, they have to be battling some things, some threat, whatever. We took it from there.

JIM SALICRUP: *Did they want to make it a contemporary group, or was that Marvel?*

LARRY: They wanted it to be very contemporary. So, I sat down to do a bunch of dossiers — enough to give me a good blueprint to work from. I think I included two to three times as much information as was actually needed. We even did appeal and personality profiles and psychological assessments of characters.

DWIGHT: *Where'd you draw from, to come up with the background and personalities? What was it based on?*

LARRY: Basically, for my own purposes, for me to get a handle on the character, I assigned each a sort of role model.

DWIGHT: *Any examples?*

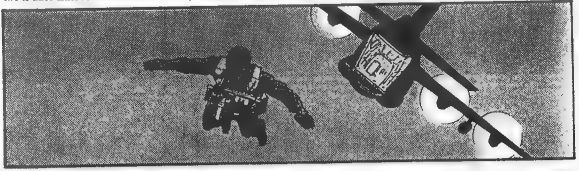
LARRY: A real example? Um, gee. .this falls into some really great legal areas. *(Laughter.)* Suffice it so say that that's more of a tool for me to be able to keep tabs on stuff. It's much easier to keep track of. Otherwise, if you have a less specific view of the *character* of the character, the character tends to drift in and out of focus. I think the characterizations in any of this stuff is extremely important. The actual technical stuff, even the military material, I don't think is ever as important as putting down very consistent, likable characters. Very few people are going to know whether the material is right, but everyone will automatically sense if a character is not right. Mostly, I think that's what people remember about anything. Like I keep saying to the writers that work for me: You can read PEANUTS for 25 years and you will know all of those **Schulz** characters backwards and forwards, know how any one of those characters would react in a situation, but it's very difficult for you to sit down and recount one strip from the past 25 years.

DWIGHT: *What have been your most successful characters?*

LARRY: Snake-Eyes and Storm Shadow, I believe.

DWIGHT: *Why is that?*

LARRY: Well, Snake-Eyes was purposely made very mysterious. He's completely covered from head to foot. Nobody knows what he looks like. He doesn't speak — no thought balloons. He is your blank slate,



balloons or captions or sound effects."

and he becomes a universal blank slate for projection of fantasy for anybody, because he is so unspecific. But he is specific in his personality traits: his sincerity, his will, his loyalty.

DWIGHT: *And Storm Shadow?*

LARRY: Well, Storm Shadow ties in with Snake-Eyes. They sort of complement each other. There's sort of this triad of intertwining loyalties between Snake-Eyes and Storm Shadow and Scarlett. I think the whole factor of actual loyalties as it appears is a very powerful fantasy, especially with the age group we're dealing with.

DWIGHT: *You did one adventure which featured Snake-Eyes which had absolutely no dialogue at all.*

LARRY: Yeah, that was "Silent Interlude." I wanted to see if I could do a story that was a real, complete story — beginning, middle, end, conflict, characterization, action, solid resolution — without balloons or captions or sound effects. I tried to do it again, as a matter of fact, with the JOE YEARBOOK #3 story. It's a 22-page silent story drawn by **Ron Wagner**, who is a new comer who I think is really hot. Gonna be a contenduh. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *How have you worked with the different artists on G.I. JOE, like say Herb Trimpe and Rod Whigham? Do you do layouts?*

LARRY: No, I do page-by-page plots, because I like to have a real specific page break. I like to try to engineer my stories so that there's a little bit at the end of each page that makes them want to turn the page; just a little bit of mystery or a little bit of what's going to happen next. I generally plot it page by page and I try to figure out an average of four-to-six panels per page and engineer it that way, and it pretty much seems to work out. Rod is very fussy and a real stickler for detail. Herb is always a pleasure to work with. Everybody that's ever worked on the book has been a real pleasure to work with. I've been very lucky.

DWIGHT: *How often do you have to create new characters for the line?*

LARRY: Every year.

DWIGHT: *But is it like once a year or twice a year or...*

LARRY: It stretches out. I just finished, a few months ago, a whole batch of new dossiers — about 24 or 25 characters. There's a little bit more this year, because there's a movie coming out which has a bunch of new characters.

DWIGHT: *How has the movie affected what you're doing both in the dossiers and in the comic books?*

LARRY: Well, the plotlines of the movies, the mini-series, the syndicated series, they don't really affect the storyline of the regular JOE book or the SPECIAL MISSIONS book because it's two completely different mediums. Each one has its own set of restrictions and so on and so forth. Because of programming restrictions there's a lot of things that the Joes can do in the comics that they can't do on TV — and there's a lot of purely kinetic things that you can do wonderfully with animation that you just really can't make work in a comic book. The animation is pretty damn good.

We've been following one basic storyline pretty much in the comic for fifty issues. It's sort of like an extended soap opera, although I try to have a real solid resolution at the end of each book. But I like to keep some plot threads going. There's a sort of episodic quality to some of the earlier books, like one episode will last maybe six issues. That will resolve completely, but two issues into it another thread may have started. At any given time there's probably about three overlapping threads. Did I wander off the question? *(Laughter.)*

HIJACK!
MAYDAY! MAYDAY! SPACE SHUTTLE UNION
NASA
States
WE'RE COBRA AND WE'RE ATTACKING YOU
A SUBTLE DIFFERENCE OF OPINION BROKEVER
ACCURACY COUNTS! WILD WEASEL "ALMOST" ONLY COUNTS IN HORSESHOES AND HAND GRENADES!
COME UP SPACE SHUTTLE!
I DON'T LIKE IT, BUT IT LOOKS AS IF WE HAVE NO CHOICE!

Bonus! A never before reprinted four-page story by Larry and Paul Kirschner.

JIM: *Are you involved with the animated series at all?*

LARRY: No. I was going to write an episode and then my time problem became too acute — since I'm writing two monthly books and one bi-monthly book, as well as holding down my editorial job, it got pretty rough. **Denny O'Neil**, I think, did write one that was already produced and aired.

DWIGHT: *Sgt. Slaughter recently became a new member of the Joes. How did that wind up fitting into the G.I. JOE continuity?*

LARRY: I tried to make him fit into the continuity as naturally as I could. Next year I have to fit Rocky in, so it's...

JIM: *Rocky's going to be in it?*

DWIGHT: *Are you serious?*

LARRY: Yeah, Rocky Balboa is another Joe.

DWIGHT: *Tell us more.*

LARRY: I haven't even see the doll yet. I've seen preliminary sketches, but I al-

WE NAILED HIM!
LET'S RETREAT AROUND!
BAM
BAM
BAM

"It was just totally mind boggling."

ready did the dossier and he will be in, I guess, 1987.

DWIGHT: *I wonder why Rocky and not Rambo?*

LARRY: Rambo is already licensed. *(Laughter.)* You know, Hasbro makes a deal and for the most part I try to incorporate it in as best I can. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. There's a few cases where it becomes very difficult, but they generally work themselves out.

DWIGHT: *I was thinking, Zartan's first background created a bit of controversy.*

LARRY: Yes, it did, because he seemed apparently to be a shape-shifter. My attempt to rationalize that was through the use of holographic projection rather than to actually have him capable of organically, physiologically changing his shape.

DWIGHT: *I was thinking specifically that in this dossier, in his personality chart, he was labeled —*

LARRY: Oh, that one! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *— a paranoid schizophrenic.*

LARRY: Yeah, I said he was a paranoid schizophrenic and, apparently, paranoid schizophrenics are organized. As a friend of mine said, "You should have known — if anybody was going to be paranoid, it was going to be paranoids." *(Laughter.)* I think, in a certain way, it was overreaction. I didn't say in the dossier that all paranoid schizophrenics were criminals. I just said that this particular person happened to be criminally-oriented and was also a paranoid schizophrenic. And I'm sure there are plenty of criminal people who are.

DWIGHT: *What did you change the profile to?*

LARRY: I didn't. *(Laughter.)* I think the toy package was changed and that one line was removed.

DWIGHT: *How much latitude are you given on the background of the individual characters? Does Hasbro give you guidelines or are you given carte blanche?*

LARRY: I'm given a lot of freedom. Basically, when I start to sit down and write it, I sort of know vaguely what the guy looks like and what his job skills are. Okay, this guy has got a blond moustache and he is a survivalist. That's about it. Then I have to come up with a background, figure out where he went to school, why he's into it, you know, and spice it up and give him some motivation.

DWIGHT: *Ever since G.I. JOE came out, the book's had mixed fan reaction. Why do you think fans come out so strongly against it?*

LARRY: I don't write for fans, that's why. *(Laughter.)* Because it's about, I suppose, stuff they're really not into.

JIM: *Well, you mentioned something before about the age group. Is there a specific audience you're writing for?*

LATER...
ACE THIS 'N RUNS WILL BE READY TO GO IN THE EARLY AFTERNOON AS SOON AS WE GET OUR HARDWARE OFF-LOADS.
I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU DON'T THE BOOK FOR US ALREADY?
I'VE BEEN CROSS-TRAINING AREA FOR MONTHS, A LOT OF THE SCUTTLE I'D USE ANYWHERE
UNSAFE
NO VISUAL TRACE, RADAR BLIP... NOTHING!
I'M SURE THEY'VE RAPPELLED OFF THE FACE OF THE BUILDING.
WILD BILL IS OVER THE
DON'T GET LOST, COVER GIRL!
I'M A RUSH CLOTH IN THE ONE AND CAN'T TELL A YAK'S TIT FROM A
I CAN GO READ A MAP
AND WITH A COPTER, WE CAN SET UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL!
SOUND YOU CAN START WITH THIS ONE. I HEAR THEY SERVE SOUP THREE-STAR RESTAURANTS

LARRY: Well, yeah. I think that the major part of the market that buys comics is between eight and thirteen years old or thereabouts. I try not to write down. I figure if they don't understand something, then they can look it up. I also figure that any kid that's reading a comic *is* reading, which probably makes him a cut above other kids in his age group who never read anything other than what they are required to read in school. And I figure what they want from a comic is an entertaining read. I'm really not out to do anything else. My primary objective is to entertain — my objective is not to curry the favor of somebody that writes reviews of things.

My problem with the fans, I think, is that they're trying to see something in the medium that's not there — trying to rationalize their involvement in something that they should have given up when they were fourteen by trying to read something into the comics that isn't there and, in a way, shouldn't be there. They take it too damn seriously. Read *real* books. I love reading. I read between half-a-dozen to a dozen books a week. I don't read that many comics.

DWIGHT: *Which ones do you read?*

LARRY: I can't name one off the bat. *(Laughter.)* I read the early POWER PACKs. I liked them.

DWIGHT: *Do you read many of the independent publications?*

LARRY: No. If I can't understand what's going on by looking at the pictures then I don't even bother to read it. I think that's the bottom line. If you can't figure out more than 50% of what's going on simply by looking at the pictures, something's wrong with the comic book.

DWIGHT: *Getting back to G.I. JOE... (Laughter.) Have you ever seen all of the toys assembled in one room?*

LARRY: Yes, I have, as a matter of fact.

DWIGHT: *What's it look like?*

LARRY: It looks like a veritable army. *(Laughter.)* It's pretty damn impressive.

JIM: *This is one of the first comic books to be heavily promoted on TV. Has it worked?*

LARRY: Has it worked? I'll say it has!

"The fans take it too damn seriously.

AN HOUR LATER...
ONLY THE WIND, BLOWING THROUGH THE GHOST OF THE BUFFALO
THERE'S NOTHING THERE, SARGE!
I'LL CHECK IT OUT...
WAIT! SEE...AT THE BASE OF THE MOUNTAIN!
GLITTER'S FACTORY!
I SEE IT! SEE! AH'M, WILD BILL.
AIN'T NO HURRY. ONCE IF'N IT'S BURNING IT AIN'T GOING ANYPLACE
WELL, I'LL BE--
WHAT THE--
ARM ALL WEAPONS SYSTEMS WHATEVER...IS IT'S JUST OVER THE RIDGE

I think it's also opened it up to a very different type of audience. I get a lot of letters from girls. I get a lot of letters from young housewives who sort of started watching the cartoons with their kids and sort of started getting into the characters, and then somewhere along the line picked up the comic book and they started following the stories and got caught up in the continuity.

DWIGHT: *It seems like a contradiction, almost, because women's interests have always been typecast for things like MISTY.*

LARRY: There's something that I hadn't even realized that I was doing which comes up in the mail — and I get an awful lot of mail on the book, like 1,200 letters a week...

DWIGHT: *Whistles.*

LARRY: Most of the girls that write in say that the reason they like the comic is that the women characters are simply part of the team. They're not treated as any different from the other team members. They don't go around with their palms nailed to their foreheads. They're competent, straight forward, and they go ahead and get the job done. They also participate emotionally. **They have their likes and dislikes. They're** not ill-treated and they're not running around being worryworts.

DWIGHT: *You mentioned once in a talk I had with you that you'll make suggestions for names, but sometimes you'll have to go through multiple name-changes before one will actually be accepted.*

LARRY: Well, sure. It has to be cleared. Somebody down the line someplace else may have already had that particular name copyrighted as a toy. It's impossible for me to foresee that, so I give them my first choice and then I usually supply up to a half-dozen alternates in order of preference. Most of the time my first preference makes it. If it doesn't, it's usually because of a copyright conflict, more than anything else.

JIM: *Why don't we get some background from Larry and start from the beginning? (Laughter.) You don't have a code name do you?*

LARRY: No. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Jim is reading from one of Larry's dossiers.*

LARRY: My particular background, I don't know if it's all that pertinent. As a writer I think it's the work that counts.

DWIGHT: *Well, you're also an artist.*

LARRY: I've been in this business awhile. I only really started writing fairly recently, but I've probably done pretty much every job in comics. I've been a letterer, a colorist.

JIM: *What attracted you to comic books in the first place? What made you want to read a comic book?*

LARRY: Well, like most kids I knew, when I was a kid I had a big stack of comic books in my closet. The comics I read as a kid were pretty varied. I had a big stack of WALT DISNEYs, BUGS BUNNYs, DAFFY DUCKs, UNCLE SCROOGEs . . . I loved UNCLE SCROOGE. I loved the stories.

DWIGHT: *The stories were what appealed to you most?*

LARRY: I think I was always more fascinated by the stories and the characterizations. When the Marvels appeared I pretty much had the complete run from #1 of FANTASTIC FOUR and SPIDER-MAN and so on. Of course, I always read SUPERMAN and BATMAN, but more sporadically.

DWIGHT: *Were you drawing at the time?*

LARRY: Yeah, I drew as a kid. I used to try to do my own comics on looseleaf paper, in pencil or whatever. Basically, I tried to actually do whole stories rather than just drawing the characters — but I never really saw it as something I could do as a career. I went to the High School of Art and Design, in New York, and when I started going there I wanted to be a painter. And in my first week at school I ran into a kid named, honest to God, **John Smith.** *(Laughter.)* **John Smith** was one of the best artists I'd ever met. This guy could really draw. And he was a real comics freak. He was into the good stuff: **Hal Foster, Lou Fine, Reed Crandall, Frank Frazetta.** He started showing me stuff that I wasn't even aware of having existed.

Then he introduced me to a guy by the name of **Larry Ivie** who was putting out a magazine called LARRY IVIE'S MONSTERS AND HEROES. We'd go over to **Larry**'s after school and all sorts of people traipsed through his house, like **Roy Krenkel** and **Archie Goodwin**; and Larry had bound volumes of PRINCE VALIANT and THE SPIRIT. This was the first time I'd ever seen THE SPIRIT and the first time I'd ever seen a complete collection of **Reed Crandall**'s BLACKHAWKs. It was just totally mind boggling. That opened up a whole aspect of it that I'd been totally unaware of. And it was through **Larry Ivie** that I eventually got to meet **Wally Wood,** which was a major turning

Read *real* books. I love reading."

point in my life.

DWIGHT: *After you got out of high school, what did you do next? Were you thinking about a career in comic books at that point?*

LARRY: Actually, when I got out of high school I was doing some undergrounds. You know, the concept back then — this is the late '60s — breaking into mainstream comics seemed a very unreachable goal. The companies seemed much more inaccessable in a lot of ways. They all seemed to have house artists. But the boom in the undergrounds was at its apex. Everybody was publishing them and it just seemed wide open. All these guys had, like, come into town looking to get into comics, like **Berni Wrightson** and **Mike Kaluta. Vaughn Bode** was putting out a tabloid called THE GOTHIC BLIMPWORKS that was publishing an awful lot — Berni's early stuff when he was working in a very **Graham Ingels** style, **Kaluta**'s "Star Child," which was very late '60s stuff. It was a lot of fun. But even then I didn't quite see it like . . . it didn't pay much. So I was working drawing shoes for mailorder catalogs. It was a job. Afterward, when I was working for **Wally Wood** —

JIM: *How did you get from drawing shoes to working for Woody?*

LARRY: Actually, I guess in '71 or thereabouts, I was living in Brooklyn and working with **Ralph Reese,** freelance stuff. I was pencilling and he was inking and we were doing a lot of jobs for NATIONAL LAMPOON — and at that time **Woody** was moving to Brooklyn, six to eight blocks from where I lived. In the process of helping him move, he said, "Hey, are you interested in a semi-regular job?" *(Laughter.)* I said sure.

He had two regular strips to do at the time and he basically needed a jack-of-all-trades assistant and somebody to talk to. That's why the little diploma on the wall reads THE WALL WOOD SCHOOL OF COMIC ART AND APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY. And basically, **Woody** sat me down and taught me to letter because "you should always know how to letter your own stuff." Working in the **Wood** studio was like a real concentrated education because he would take the time to teach. For everything he said, he was really into it.

He would make up slogans and charts and put them on the wall and then he would in practice ignore them. His most famous one was: Never draw anything you can copy, never copy anything you can trace, never trace anything you can cut out and paste up. He would put that up there and you would go, "We're really going to roll ahead now and really be productive and

SORRY WE DIDN'T MAKE YOU ON THE COMMERCIAL BUT ONLY NOT SHOWING OUR BUTTS AS THEY'RE TOO FAMOUS TO BE SEEN HANGIN' ALL AROUND HERE
LOOKS LIKE SOME OF THE STUFF FROM "DR. STRANGE"
SHHHH A BREAK! WE SAVED THE BRUTTE FROM THE VOLCANO AND NOW WE'RE ON OUR WAY ACROSS THE BARRENS AND WILD WASTE. A -A BYSTERWIDER
SO HOW DID YOU DO IT, CLUTCH? WE ALL GIVE UP AND CAME UP WITH SIX
EXPERT MAP READERS THAT'S WHAT DID IT
WE WERE DRIVING ALONG IN A RIDGE AND I NOTICED THAT WHERE THIS DEEP DEPRESSION S ON THE MAP, THE ACTUAL DESERT BELOW US WAS FLAT!!
PRECHING THE REST WAS ELEMENTARY, DEARIE. SIMPLY STRETCH A CANDELABRA ACROSS THE ROOM AND THE ANGLE OF THE CANDLES TO WHAT'S WE SHOULD BE DOING
NOTHING, I'VE NEVER HEARD OF IT
OH, CLUTCH I DON'T KNOW HOW AND WHY BUT THERE IS A HOLE IN THE DESERT, AND WE LOOK AT THE HOLE AND WE LOOK, AND
SO HE FINDS A HOLE IN THE DESERT AND POINTS INTO THE DESERT TO MAKE THE HOLE BUT HE WON'T BE LOST ANYMORE
AND SOMEHOW HIMSELF A CHARACTER-CHANGING CONUNDRUM!
FREEEEZE-FRY!

stuff." And then it would just go out the window and he would just be doodling away on something. He'd really get into it. He was like that. He was a very warm guy and that was infectious. He loved the form and he made you appreciate it. I think the same is true of somebody like **Neal Adams,** who really helped dozens of guys break into the field, one way or the other, and is not all too appreciated nowadays. He'd tell you the truth and a lot of people . . . it's very hard for them to take that. He'd tell you exactly what was wrong with your work and you could either benefit from it or you could get uptight about it.

DWIGHT: *Artists always seemed to have that sort of community atmosphere where they would collect and exchange pointers and notes . . .*

LARRY: Well, Continuity Studios was infamous for that. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *But writers, it seems they've always been stuck on their own or they didn't have that association.*

LARRY: Not really. I remember that **Roy Thomas** used to have what we called First Fridays at his apartment. Everybody would **get together — writers and artists, every**body — once a month on the first Friday. This must have been in the early '70s. My dates get a little bit hazy there. That was later taken up by **Jeff Jones**, which brought in a weirdly-overlapping crowd. It was very social and very laid back. I think from Jeff the torch of First Fridays was passed to **Frank Brunner,** who at the time was living in the Bronx. Then, I think, First Fridays became dormant for awhile. They somehow evolved into poker games. *(Laughter.)* Then **Neal Adams** picked it up and lasted about a year or two. I don't know if anybody's still having them. It would be nice, because I think it's really very important to have an exchange of ideas and that sort of sense of camaraderie and belonging to something.

COMING IN PART TWO: Larry delves into the mythic world of the Crusty Bunkers, explains how singing like Bob Dylan can get you to Broadway and on national television, offers more on fans and his philosophy on comics, and tells what it's like to get imploded!

M·I·C·R·A
MIND CONTROLLED REMOTE AUTOMATON
COMING IN SEPTEMBER!
COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION
© 1985 BOONTHANAKIT

FREE PREVIEW:

ECSTASITES--FREE ENTERPRISE ZONES IN THE DECAYING OLDER CITIES, WHERE RELATIVELY CLEAN OUTSIDERS PROVIDE VISITING INSIDERS WITH THE ILLICIT SEX, DRUGS, AND BLOOD SPORTS NOT ALLOWED IN THE DOMES.
HERE, IN A DECONTAMMED HOTEL AMIDST THE SQUALOR OF DOWNTOWN DALLAS...
Mansion of Passion!
THIS IS A REAL HUMMER! I'M FORGETTING BOOT CAMP ALREADY!
FIRST TIME, SOLDIER BOY? C'MERE AND LET RITA GIVE YOU A SPECIAL WELCOME--ON THE LINE!
DALLAS ECSTASITE
DEATH AR
FREE? SURE!
Shhhh,
I DON'T DO THIS FOR JUST ANYONE,
I WON'T TELL A SOUL--
CLOSED, ONLY
THAT'S RIGHT--
--YOU WON'T!
AAAGGa!*
OWW!
2KOFF KOFFS
L-LYING BITCH--!
HA!
I CAN TAKE PAIN --UNLIKE YOU FORCER JOCKS!
KRAK!
UUUGGGHH!
WITHOUT TEN TONS OF METAL--!
YOU'RE JUST DEAD MEAT!

THAT NIGHT...
YOU THINK WE CAN COUNT ON LAURA? SHE SOUNDS TOO SOFT--
VAL CAN KEEP HER IN LINE.
LAURA'S HAD IT TOO EASY--
IF SHE HAD BEEN THROUGH WHAT I HAVE SHE WOULDN'T CARE ABOUT THOSE INSIDE LEECHES!
"INSIDERS TOOK MY SISTER ANGELA. THE ARMY KILLED MY MOTHER AND LEFT ME TO SCROUNGE OUT A LIFE.
"GANGS WERE MY FAMILY, MY SECURITY... UNTIL A RIVAL SQUAD ALMOST WIPED US OUT. I THOUGHT AN ECSTASITE WOULD BE SAFER. WHEN I PASSED THE CONTAM TESTS, I THOUGHT I WAS HOME FREE.
"I WAS WRONG. LAURA CAN'T IMAGINE THE OBSCENE WAYS THEY TWIST AND WARP YOU TO SATISFY THEIR SICK NEEDS.
"CLUSTER SEX... BLOOD TOURNEYS... AND STILL YOU NEVER WIN ENOUGH TO BUY INTO AN A.S.D...."
I'D LIKE TO KILL EVERY--
Sshh! WE'LL GIVE THEM WHAT THEY DESERVE-- SOON.
BUT YOU NEED TO RELAX-- AND I KNOW HOW!
BUT...
NOTHING!
BECAUSE OF THE ECSTASITE, I CAN'T FEEL ANYTHING...
...NOT EVEN FOR MARC!

MICRA
MIND CONTROLLED REMOTE AUTOMATON
THE BEGINNING
STORY BY LAMAR WALDRON ©1986
ART BY TED BOONTHANAKIT ©1986
EDITED BY DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN
LETTERED BY SUSAN BARROWS
TIME: NOVEMBER 20, 2048
PLACE: DR. ALETA LUCANE'S BIOENGINEERING CLASS KING UNIVERSITY A.S.D. (AIR SUPPORTED DOME), SOUTH DAKOTA
2:50
I SAW THE REMOTE'S HEAD MOVE!
HEAD MOVEMENT CONFIRMED AND CALIBRATED, DR. LUCANE.
GOOD! IT'S MOVING IN RESPONSE TO THE THOUGHTS OF THE REAL CAT.
WHY DOESN'T SHE MOVE?
THE SEDATIVE I GAVE HER ALLOWS ONLY INVOLUNTARY REFLEXES, LIKE THE TWITCHING YOU SEE IN THE TAIL.
SIGH! TEN MORE MINUTES...
IF MATT DOESN'T COME THROUGH WITH THOSE RESERVATIONS, HE CAN FORGET ABOUT EVER SEEING ME AGAIN!
SOMETHING'S WRONG-- THE REMOTE'S TAIL-- IT ISN'T MOVING--THE POWER'S DOWN--
ANGELA!

MICRA: Mind Controlled Remote Automaton #1, November 1986. Published bi-monthly by Fictioneer Books Ltd., Suite 301, 234 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10001. US: $1.75. Canada: $2.25. A **COMICS INTERVIEW** Publication. Story copyright © 1986 Lamar Waldron. Art copyright © 1986 Ted Boonthanakit. David Anthony Kraft, publisher.

WHA--? Oh, THE TAIL CONTROLS!
BITCH...
WHY CAN'T YOU LEAVE ME ALONE?
THIS REMOTE IS A MICRA--SHORT FOR MIND-CONTROLLED REMOTE AUTOMATON.
NOW...
I DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR LOUSY DEMONSTRATION!
I WONDER WHICH GUY ANGELA WAS THINKING ABOUT THIS TIME?
BESIDES RECEIVING NEURAL IMPULSES FROM THE CAT, IT ALSO SENDS BACK SENSORY INFORMATION.
SO, THE CAT SEES WHAT THE MICRA's VISUAL SENSORS PICK UP--EVEN THOUGH HER OWN EYES ARE COVERED!
SHE EVEN FEELS THE SURFACE OF THE TABLE AS THE MICRA TAKES A STEP.
THE SEDATIVE WAS NEEDED SO THE CAT DOESN'T GET CONFLICTING FEEDBACK FROM HER OWN BODY.
ONCE HUMANS CAN FUNCTION PROPERLY UNDER SUCH SEDATION, MICRAs COULD BE SENT OUTSIDE--
--ON DANGEROUS MISSIONS, LIKE REPAIRING A DOME...
...WHILE THE REPAIR CREWS STAY PROTECTED, INSIDE!
CLASS DISMISSED--EXCEPT FOR ANGELA! I'D LIKE HELP BREAKING DOWN THE EXPERIMENT!
DAMN! MATT'S PROBABLY WAITING WITH THOSE PASSES...
ANGELA, YOU MUST PAY MORE ATTENTION--
WHY? I'VE GOT MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT THAN YOUR POINTLESS EXPERIMENT!

HOURS LATER...
MATT!
WAKE UP!
I'M F-FREEZING! I'VE NEVER FELT SO COLD!
Brrr--WHAT IN HELL IS WRONG WITH THE DOME?
THE ANSWER TO ANGELA'S QUESTION IS OUTSIDE THE DOME... A REBEL ATTACK!
HEAD FOR THE SPEEDER DOCKS!
IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE!
HURRY!
MATT!
THAT BLAST--KNOCKED ME DOWN!
WAIT!
YOU'VE GOT TO HELP ME!

FEBRUARY 14, 2049
ANOTHER MORNING, JUST LIKE ALL THE REST...
I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN FACE ANOTHER DAY TRAPPED IN THIS BED...
...NO ONE TO TALK TO...
I WISH TANYA OR DR. KIM WOULD COME BY TO TALK--EVEN FOR A FEW MINUTES...
NOW, I CAN'T EVEN TELL ANYONE HOW MISERABLE I FEEL...
...NOT THAT ANYONE WOULD CARE.

THE NEXT DAY, ON THE HOSPITAL'S REC ROOF:..
APOLOGY ACCEPTED, ANGELA. NOW--WHEN DO YOU RESUME YOUR STUDIES?
STUDIES?! WHAT'LL YOU DO, DR. LUCANE--HOLD CLASS IN MY HOSPITAL ROOM?
YOU CAN WATCH CLASSES ON YOUR VID, TAKE ORAL EXAMS, AND HAVE YOUR DEGREE IN--
WHAT THEN--GET A JOB? WHERE?
I HAVE TO BE FED, I HAVE TO BE BATHED--
I CAN'T DO ANYTHING FOR MYSELF!
EXCEPT LIE HERE AND ROT!
LOOK--I KNOW YOU'RE TRYING TO HELP, BUT FACE IT...I'D BE BETTER OFF--
--IF THAT MISSILE HAD LANDED A LITTLE CLOSER!

POOR GIRL SEEMS TO HAVE NOTHING TO LIVE FOR. Hmmm...
REMEMBER THE MICRA EXPERIMENTS WITH THE CAT?
WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH ME?
PERHAPS A QUADRIPLEGIC LIKE YOURSELF COULD HELP US DEVELOP HUMAN MICRAS.
THERE'D BE NO PROBLEMS WITH CONFLICTING FEEDBACK OR SEDATIVE INTERFERENCE.
I COULD TAKE CARE OF MYSELF--USING A MICRA!

WASHINGTON, D.C.--THE ONLY OLD CITY TO BE DECONTAMMED AND COVERED BY AN A.S.D..
SO...
...IF WE DO THE MICRA PROJECT WITH THE UNIVERSITY, INSTEAD OF THE USUAL DEFENSE CONTRACTORS--
--YOU THINK WE CAN SLIP IT BY THE VICE PRESIDENT'S WATCHDOGS?
YES, MR. PRESIDENT.
EACH YEAR, FEWER SOLDIERS ARE WILLING TO LEAVE THE DOMES TO OPERATE ENFORCERS. WE MUST FIND AN ALTERNATIVE--RIGHT, GENERAL WYLER?
THAT'S TRUE...
...MICRAs COULD PATROL THE SLUMS, WHILE THE OPERATORS REMAIN SAFELY INSIDE.
OF COURSE, WE WON'T TELL DR. LUCANE EVERYTHING--
TWO DAYS LATER, IN THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE AT KING UNIVERSITY...
DR. LUCANE, WE'LL FUND MICRA--AND BUILD ALL THE HARDWARE!
I DIDN'T THINK IT HAD A CHANCE!
I NEVER IMAGINED THE ARMY WOULD BE INTERESTED.
IT ALL SOUNDS SPLENDID!
WELL, ALETA?
I DON'T LIKE HELPING THE ARMY...
...BUT THIS IS THE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME!
AND ANGELA...
...HOW COULD I FACE HER IF I SAID NO?
GENERAL WYLER--
--YOU'VE GOT A DEAL!

IN THE WEEKS SINCE WYLER'S OFFER, ANGELA HAS UNDERGONE IMPLANT SURGERY, WHILE PART OF THE HOSPITAL'S BASEMENT HAS BEEN CONVERTED INTO THE MICRA RESEARCH STATION. . .
WELCOME TO YOUR NEW HOME, ANGELA!
ERIC--IT LOOKS FANTASTIC!
IS THE MICRA UNIT HERE YET?
YES--WE'LL TEST IT THIS MORNING, BEFORE BARR GETS HERE.
I'D RATHER NOT HAVE THE ARMY LOOKING OVER MY SHOULDER THE FIRST TIME.
MICRA
CAN YOU HEAR ME, ANGELA?
GOOD. IT'S TIME TO GO INTO TRANCE.
ANGELA BEGINS THE SELF-HYPNOSIS ROUTINE SHE HAS PRACTICED FOR WEEKS. . .
BETA
OO-8
HOW CAN YOU TELL WHEN SHE'S UNDER?
HER BRAIN WAVE PATTERNS. SHE'LL SPEAK AS IF FULLY CONSCIOUS, BUT WILL AWAKEN ONLY WHEN I HIT THE ESCAPE SEQUENCE---
--OR IF THERE'S A MECHANICAL FAILURE.
ANGELA--I'M ACTIVATING THE AMPLIFIER.
CAN YOU FEEL ANYTHING?
THERE'S A TINGLING SENSATION. . .
. . .FLOWING THROUGH MY BODY. . .
LET ME KNOW WHEN YOU CAN SEE.

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by Lamar Waldron & Ted Boonthanakit

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MICRA

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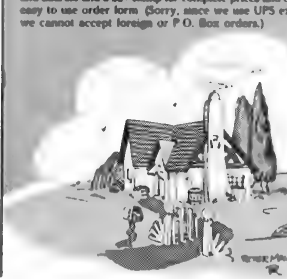

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"I wrote the outline for the G.I. JOE film."

Photos: Yang-Mi Dixon

BUZZ DIXON

When Bob Harras, editor of Marvel's G.I. JOE comics, asked me to do some articles about the new season syndicated series and upcoming movie for the G.I. JOE YEARBOOK #3, one of the people I contacted was TV writer and story editor, Buzz Dixon. Buzz was immediately helpful and tremendously courteous and my conversation with him was one of the high points of that assignment. The one thing I was sorry about was that, since my work for Marvel was specifically and only about G.I. JOE, I could not ask him about the animation industry and his experiences and problems in it. So when the opportunity arose to ask Buzz all those unanswered questions, I jumped at it. Not only was I well-rewarded with interesting answers, but Buzz proved to possess a wealth of information — some of it highly opinionated, as you shall see...

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Buzz Dixon
Born: 7 December 1953 — Raleigh, NC
Occupation: Writer
Year Entered Animation: 1978
Hobbies: I don't have time for any hobbies.
Favorite Food: It's a tie between cheesecake and sushi.
Favorite Movies: CASABLANCA; THE SEVEN SAMURAI; GONE WITH THE WIND; UNION PACIFIC
Kind of Movie Would Like to Direct if Given Chance: One that makes a lot of money.

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *How did you get into animation?*

BUZZ DIXON: Well, I literally walked into Filmation Studios about five minutes after **Lou Schelmer** said, "We need to get a new writer!" I had always wanted to write and to make movies and whatnot ever since I was thirteen years old. I was drafted when I got out of high school. Anyway, I decided to get out of the Army after six years. I wanted to go to film school so I applied to the U.S.C. and U.C.L.A. film schools and I was accepted by U.S.C., but I was discharged in February and the school didn't start until October. I figured I'd just get my feet wet, so I came to L.A. and I started with Universal and worked my way down. I got to Filmation and was talking with **Arthur Nadel** about getting a job as a driver or a gopher or something, and while we were talking he found out I had

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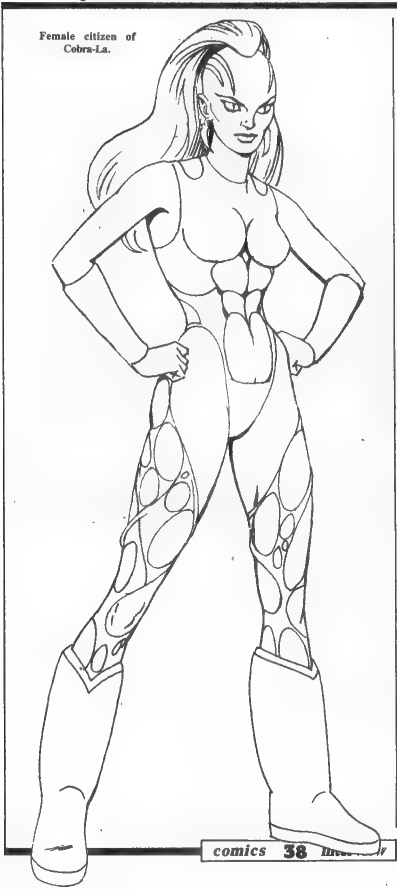
"They didn't tell me about Serpentor



Female citizen of Cobra-La.

written short stories and that I had been a newspaper editor for the Army — I was Information Specialist (Journalist). They were having a lot of trouble getting scripts for a series called SUNBRIGHT AND STARLIGHT, and he basically said, "Why don't you leave some of your short stories and why don't you try writing a script?" So I wrote a script for this series and he presented the script and two short stories to **Lou Scheimer**. Lou looked them over and said, "I don't know which one of these writers I want to hire, the guy that wrote the short stories or the guy who wrote the script." Arthur said, "They're the same guy." Lou said, "Get him!" So I ended up at Filmation Studios with a staff job. CBS decided that they didn't want that show after all, but I stayed on with Filmation and I wrote a number of shows for them, mostly in the action-adventure genre. Anyway, I got laid off from Filmation and picked up by Ruby-Spears. I worked there on THUNDARR THE BARBARIAN and GOLDIE GOLD AND ACTION JACK, both of which had a lot of design work by **Jack Kirby**. I spent three years with them and then I went freelance eventually winding up at Tokyo Movie Shinsha to work on MIGHTY ORBOTS.

It was a very peculiar situation. What happened, we usually came in second place up against SMURFS and the first season of MUPPET BABIES. We were never more than six or eight points out of first place — the most successful new show that NBC had. Unfortunately, NBC made some not very wise decisions. They bought a lot of shows sight unseen. They were committed to a lot of shows that had pay-or-play options where they had to run 'em. ORBOTS just got squeezed out.

Anyway, after that I continued with TMS for awhile and then went freelance again. I wrote for G.I. JOE. I did five episodes in the first season and I story-edited four episodes because they had a time problem — **Steve Gerber** needed some help on some of the episodes. I edited the entire second season by myself and I wrote four episodes of the second season.

DWIGHT: *And you're credited as story editor on the G.I. JOE movie, right?*

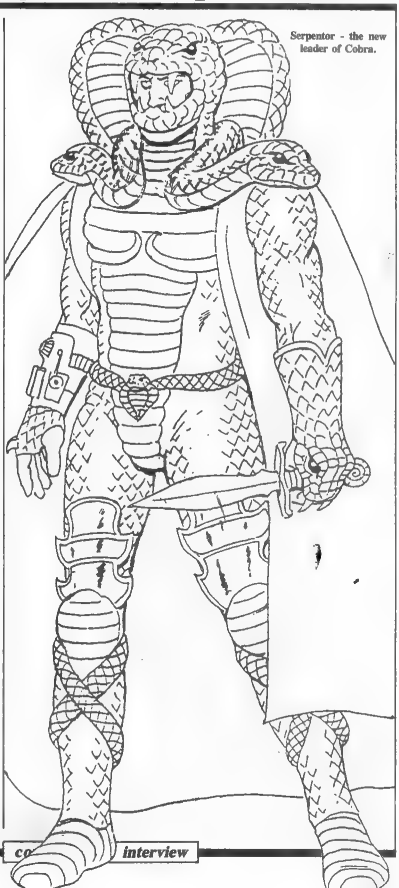
BUZZ: Story consultant. What happened with that, **Ron Freedman** was the writer for the original G.I. JOE mini-series, and he wrote the second and third mini-series as well. Ron's perception of the series did not seem to be going in the same direction that everybody else's perception was going. There's a lot more gee-whiz in Ron's stuff as compared with, like, **Steve Gerber**'s or mine, where we try to put at least a veneer of realism to it. For example, a

until we had gotten into production."

lot of his stuff is "**Roger Moore** James Bond" and a lot of the things that Steve and I were trying to do were "**Sean Connery** James Bond" stuff. The **Connery** Bond movies had a little bit more of an edge and a core to 'em. The **Moore** Bonds, even though they were more financially successful, just didn't take themselves seriously and tended to be very flighty and light.

Anyway, Ron wrote an outline for the G.I. JOE feature and they had problems with it, and the more Ron rewrote the outline the more problems they had. It was a case — as anybody who is a writer will know — where sometimes you just get off on the wrong step and try as you might you can't get back in step. Ron came up with some very interesting ideas, many of which were incorporated in the film, but he just didn't get into the spirit of the thing. **Steve Gerber** came in and did some work on the outline, and the problem was that Steve was trying to make Ron's outline work. They asked me to come in and work on it. I read over it and I told them very frankly, "I don't think we can make this outline work. I think we just have to start from scratch." They appeared relieved to hear that and decided that was probably the best thing to do, so they asked me to write the outline for the film. I was given characters that had been designed by Hasbro but had not yet been named, and I was allowed to pick their personalities and names and whatnot. They gave me, for instance, a Hispanic M.P. with a dog. They became Law and Order. I forget which one is Law and which one is Order now — it just slipped my mind.

Anyway, I have to backtrack a bit before we go on to the feature to explain what led up to the feature. The second season of G.I. JOE is a significant change from the first season. Basically, it's the inclusion of Serpentor, the Cobra Emperor. When I took over G.I. JOE they had decided they were going to include Serpentor, the new leader of Cobra, but they didn't bother to tell me about it until we had actually gotten into production. I was gonna write the definitive Cobra story. I had a two-parter that I was gonna do called, "The Most Dangerous Man In the World" that was about, you might say, the **Karl Marx** or the **Nietzsche** of Cobra. It was essentially this philosopher who had cooked up the basic operating philosophy of Cobra in some classroom. The people who founded Cobra heard about him, about this philosophy, adopted it for their own; and since they had somewhat perverted the philosophy — as the Communists and the Nazis did with the **Marx** and **Nietzsche** philosophies — they couldn't have the original philosopher running around loose



Serpentor - the new leader of Cobra.

"We are going to have one of the most spec-

and saying they were doing it wrong, so they imprisoned him; and he managed to escape in the first part of this and the Joes didn't know who he was but they knew that Cobra suspended all of their operations and were tracking this guy down. This must be the most dangerous man in the world if even Cobra is afraid of him. The Joes spend the entire first half of the story tracking him down, and when they capture him he's this little, short, dumpy professor, and they find out that the reason Cobra is after him is because he's the one guy who can take away any claim of legitimacy that Cobra has.

DWIGHT: *It sounds like a great story.*

BUZZ: It is. I had done a premise on it and I was getting ready to outline it when they came to me and said, "By the way, we've got a new Cobra leader." I said, **"WHAT!!!"** And they said, "Yeah, he's Cobra Commander's boss." I said, "Excuse me, but we've had absolutely no hint in three mini-series and an entire season of episodes that there was *anybody* over and above Cobra Commander!" I mean, if they had thought of something like this originally then there should have been some shadowy organization referred to that Cobra Commander had to answer to, but instead they just whipped this guy out. So, it was up to me to find a way of including Serpentor into the series.

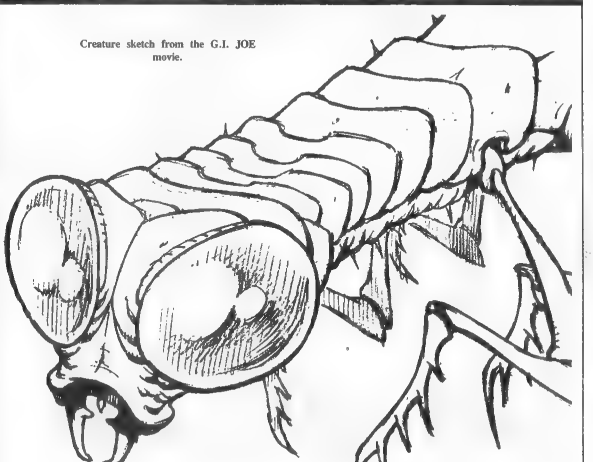
DWIGHT: *How'd you do it.*

BUZZ: How do you work this guy in? One way is to simply stick this guy in and hope nobody notices, which wouldn't have worked. Another is that he was always there and nobody ever talked about him before, which also wouldn't work. The other was to explain how he got there, how he came in, so I came up with two theories. The first one was Cobra-la — and I want to apologize right now for the name Cobra-la. You see, a lot of times a writer will create what he calls a place-holder name, which is just a name to refer to a character or a device until you figure out what you're really going to call it. So I figured, well, Cobra was founded by this shadowy organization somewhere called Cobra-la — an obvious parallel to Shangri-la. They sent Cobra Commander out with the order to conquer the world and Cobra Commander fucked up so they sent Serpentor out next. The other suggestion I had was that they created Serpentor. Destro and Dr. Mindbender had decided that Cobra Commander wasn't cutting it and they needed a better leader, so they just created a better leader. They robbed the graves of various military dictators from history and took their D.N.A.and combined that into one superleader, and this was Serpentor.

I submitted both the ideas to Sunbow Productions. They submitted them to Hasbro and Hasbro said, "We like 'em both." We ended up having to figure something out all over again. *(Laughter.)* They had not yet done the JOE-4 mini-series, which will be the mini-series that starts off the 1986 season, and they went ahead to do the feature. We had already been using Serpentor in the '86 season, and we started to make references to his abilities and why he was in Cobra and whatnot — but all of the time keeping it very hush-hush and secretive.

The rear exit to Cobra-La.

tacular animated sequences ever done!"



Creature sketch from the G.I. JOE movie.

So that brings us back to the feature. Ron had written an outline and I came in. I looked at the outline and — I'll be very frank — it was unusable. The problem was that there was really no emotional core to the story. They had a lot of people running around chasing each other, blowing things up, shooting at people, but there was nothing in it that the viewer could look at and latch onto to say "this is what the story's about."

DWIGHT: *This is the way they're doing everything these days.*

BUZZ: Yeah. I said what we need is something we haven't done before. We need to have a Joe who really screws up as a Joe and throughout the course of the adventure he learns what it is he's done wrong and what it is to be a Joe and he redeems himself. The theme of the movie, so to speak, is redemption. They liked that.

The next thing we talked about was who this character was and why would they tolerate a screw-up like this. If the guy screwed up once they'd boot him out. Why keep somebody that can't do the job? Well, obviously, he's kept because he's related to somebody who is important to the Joes, somebody who's using his pull to keep his son or his brother in. My original suggestion was that General Hawk had a son, Lt. Falcon — we originally called him Baby Hawk, but that was a little bit too cute, so it was changed to Lt. Falcon. Then, for reasons I'm not entirely clear of, Sunbow and Hasbro decided he isn't General Hawk's son but the brother of one of the Joes, who was responsible for getting him into the Joes and for covering up his short-comings until, of course, he made his big, colossal screw-up. That gave us the core to the story, the spine of the story.

Everything else revolved around or played off the main theme in some way. In addition to Falcon there's also the group called the Rawhides. They are new recruits and they have to prove themselves. We have Sgt. Slaughter's Renegades who have to prove themselves. The reason they're Renegades is that they're so wild and unpredictable and uncontrollable that they can't be regular Joes. Serpentor is redeemed — not in a positive sense — but he learns about who he is and where he stands in the overall scheme of things. And Cobra Commander has a redemption, too — he somehow ends up helping the Joes. Everywhere we went in the story we always tried to have the sub-plot reflect off of this central theme of redemption. Once we had that the movie was really very easy to write, and I can say with no false modesty that we are going to have probably one of the most spectacular animated sequences ever done. It will blow people away. It's going to be just incredible.

DWIGHT: *Well, with the movie itself there are a number of stars that are actually involved who contributed their voices.*

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"Don Johnson of MIAMI VICE is Lt. Falcon."

BUZZ: Right. **Shiro Akune**, the Japanese actress, she did Jinx. She was marvelous, a delight. **Dick Gautier** is Serpentor. We have a number of very famous voice people. **Sgt. Slaughter**, of course, plays himself. He was a little disappointed that his personal tank got blown up — I might mention that. *(Laughter.)* He asked us, you know, if he was going to get another tank, and we assured him he would. **Burgess Meredith** is in it. **Don Johnson** is Lt. Falcon.

We never had, with the exception of some of the minor characters, a number of people in at one time to do the voices. We would usually bring just one person in at a time. A lot of credit has got to go to **Wally Burr**, who was the voice director, because Wally had to remember not only what this person was saying but what somebody else was saying and how they were saying it. You couldn't have one person say something seriously and the person he's talking to respond as if it were a joke, see. You had to keep the emotional level consistent in each scene. Considering that a lot of characters, they might only have one line in the scene and their characters are scattered throughout the movie — it was very difficult and he did a wonderful job of keeping track of everything.

They read the script very well. It was one of the best recording sessions I've ever attended. They really seemed to get into the characters. You've probably heard this yourself, there are too many animated shows where the people are going *yeah-yeah-wink-wink-nudge-nudge*, we know these are just animated characters. They don't make an effort to really act. They do mannerism and shticks but they're not really trying to convey any emotional information through the characters. With what we were doing the actors were really acting. They were really trying to project characterization and nuance and whatnot. They did a superlative job. I can't praise them enough.

DWIGHT: *I'd like to ask you about the relationship of syndicated animation shows to merchandising — there's been a lot of criticism lately about things like G.I. JOE and TRANSFORMERS being glorified 30-minute commercials.*

BUZZ: There has always been a tie-in between animation and merchandising, or between everything and merchandising. It's ridiculous, I think, to say you can't do it because it's for children, or you can't do it because your're going to be manipulating the children. This is baloney. If you have a good product, a product that is interesting to the child and the child wants it, then the child will go for it. If they don't want it you can't shove it down their throats. There are a number of toys that just aren't doing as well as HE-MAN toys or G.I. JOE toys or TRANSFORMERS toys. TRANSFORMERS alone out-grossed all the other transforming robot toys put together two-to-one, I think. The reason, and I don't mean to point fingers or slam anybody — but if you compare a GOBOTS episode with a TRANSFORMERS episode, there's a very Saturday-morning mindlessness to GOBOTS, and even though TRANSFORMERS may not be the best of all possible giant robot shows, at least there's enough idiosyncratic characterization and personal expression coming through that marks it as different from the other types of shows.

The argument is that you put a show on the air and you're coercing kids to go out

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"Jerry Falwell started an orphanage."

and buy the toy. That's utter nonsense because if that were the case then anybody who got a show on the air would be able to sell their toys. It's clearly not what's happening. We'll be frank — they put the show on the air to encourage kids to buy the toys. But if the kids don't want to buy it, then they're not going to buy it no matter how many shows you put on the air. And if they want to buy it then they're going to go out and look for it. That's about the only thing I can say on that.

A lot of the people who have been criticizing these shows as half-hour commercials, you also have to understand, are really professional critics By that I mean they're like the **Peggy Charren**s and the **Dr. Thomas Radeckis** and whatnot — people who make their living just bitching about things.

DWIGHT: *And if it's not this then they'll find something else.*

BUZZ: Exactly. Two producers that I once worked for had lunch with **Peggy Charren** and they asked her point blank: If everybody, the networks and the producers, just knuckled in and gave in to you and were going to do the shows the way **Peggy Charren** thinks they should be done — would you close up shop and go away? She said no, that she'd find something else to do. That's the truth. These people are professional critics. They make their money by complaining and by getting people to donate money to them and by getting government grants — my money! — and...

DWIGHT: *Our money.*

BUZZ: Well, I tend to personify it — it's my money! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *It's a heck of a statement about an individual's personality that the way that they're making their living is to constantly tear something down rather than trying to build something up.*

BUZZ: Exactly. I have never once seen **Peggy Charren** produce even a special. I've never heard of **Dr. Thomas Radecki** writing an episode and showing the way it should be done. These people never create *anything*! They only *assault* what other people have done. I'll give **Jerry Falwell**, who's an anti-abortionist, at least this much credit; at least he went out and did something. He started an orphanage. He started a home for unwed mothers. I disagree with his point of view and he can't solve the problem by himself, but I'll give the guy credit for at least *doing* something positive. **Peggy Charren** and **Dr. Thomas Radecki** have never done anything positive.

Radecki, first of all, he has an incredibly sloppy scale of rating violence in a show. For instance, he does not differentiate between shaking a fist in anger at someone and taking a shotgun and blowing that person's head off at point-blank range. They are both equally violent in his eyes. He even considers tickling to be an act of violence! Second, as a result, the P.T.A. a few years ago came down on violence in television and they cited a number of shows that you would expect, action-adventure shows, but they also cited DALLAS as being a violent show. Everybody went, "What's the violence in DALLAS?" Okay, every once in awhile somebody gets slapped and there was the famous J.R.-gets-shot episode, but an entire season of physical violence on DALLAS doesn't equal, like, a single episode of THE A-TEAM. When the P.T.A. was asked to explain they said they were committing violence against the law. By breaking the law, by doing sneaky underhanded things, they were committing acts of violence. These people are equating embezzlement with forcible rape.

DWIGHT: *It sounds a lot like BRAVE NEW WORLD. You know, you limit things; just eliminate all of the other words and it's either one thing or the other.*

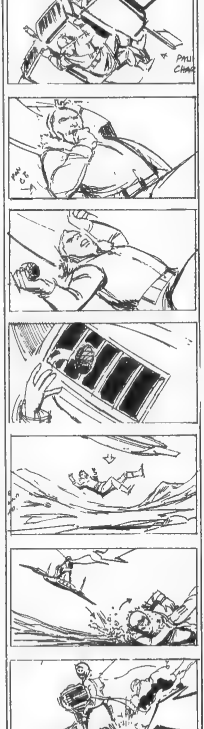
BUZZ: Yeah, or 1984. You simply redefine the terms. It's very ridiculous.

DWIGHT: *Earlier you mentioned "Saturday-morning mindlessness." That seems to say, "network restrictions." What is the actual comparison between network restrictions versus what you've been able to do in syndication?*

BUZZ: Well, there's a very logical difference. Take, for example, the squishy shows like SMURFS, ALVIN AND THE CHIPMONKS, MUPPET BABIES, on network television. These shows actually have fewer restrictions than the action-adventure shows, for obvious reasons. There is very little if any direct physical conflict to these shows. Alvin may fuss with his brothers but he never hauls off and punches them. Those shows, as long as you're willing to stay within the parameters of what the network wants, they tend to leave you alone. It's interesting to note that on all three of those shows — which are or were very successful — the network is not the final authority. They have the right to say no. They may not be able to make you do a show they want, but they can stop you from doing a show they don't want. They at least have veto power.

This was one of the problems that ORBOTS had, was that ORBOTS was created out of necessity, almost. **Fred Silverman** had a commitment for three shows to NBC. Two of the shows went belly up and nobody wanted to work with him. TMS was trying to get their own shows produced, and so it was kinda like making

Duke battles Serpentor in the upcoming movie.



"For instance, for a long time I was the

a deal with the Devil. **Fred Silverman's** commitment meant the show would get on the air. But once **Silverman** got it into motion he really didn't understand what he had created, or what he had asked to be created, and the show . . . it was an awful mess, is all I can say. **Michael Reaves** deserves a lot of credit for trying to hold that show together. And the network would come in with the silliest damn restrictions. For instance, you couldn't allow the robots to get hurt.

DWIGHT: *What!?*

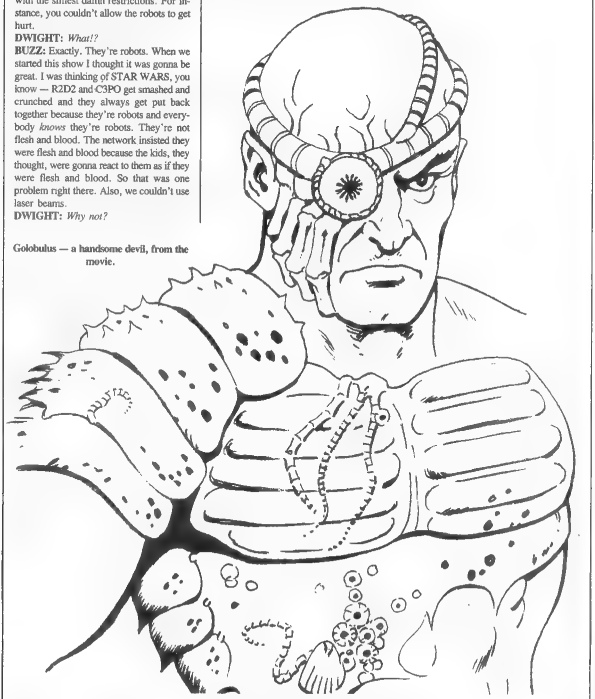
BUZZ: Exactly. They're robots. When we started this show I thought it was gonna be great. I was thinking of STAR WARS, you know — R2D2 and C3PO get smashed and crunched and they always get put back together because they're robots and everybody *knows* they're robots. They're not flesh and blood. The network insisted they were flesh and blood because the kids, they thought, were gonna react to them as if they were flesh and blood. So that was one problem right there. Also, we couldn't use laser beams.

DWIGHT: *Why not?*

BUZZ: You couldn't use a thin beam of light as a weapon. You could use a concentric beam of light, one that widens as it comes out, but a laser beam was considered too violent. You couldn't use any weapons that looked like a gun, which actually worked to the advantage of the show because the stuff looked more futuristic. But it had to look, you know, like a non-weapon.

DWIGHT: *And so we have coffee pots shooting at each other.*

BUZZ: Yeah, you have a lot of that. There's a lot of this attitude at the networks. For instance, for a long time I was the official bad example at ABC. One of the



Golobulus — a handsome devil, from the movie.

official bad example at ABC network."

Heather's Original strip sequence, before the companies toned it down.

THUNDARR scripts — the one that was the second season opener — was what they used as an entrance examination for people who wanted to be censors at ABC. They would give them my outline and tell 'em to go through it and find all of the stuff that's wrong with it.

What happened was when THUNDARR got on the air nobody really knew what to expect. It was a very powerful show. It looks wimpy compared to G.I. JOE, but at the time it was a pretty kick-ass show. It was considered too violent by ABC program practices and they made no bones about it that they were going to tone it down for the second season, so **Joe Ruby**, of Ruby-Spears, asked me to write the second season opener. The theory was that we would just do an episode that was so horrendously violent, so incredibly violent, that even if they went through and took most of the stuff out they still wouldn't be able to gut it completely, and then we could say in subsequent episodes whenever they tried to make us take anything out, "Hey, you let us do it in the opener. Why can't we do it now?" The first draft I turned in was so horrendously violent that **Joe Ruby** just blanched at it and said there was no way we could send it to the network. *(Laughter.)* So I toned it down a little and the network, of course, freaked out on it completely. I had robots being dropped into big, ducted fans and just *Pling!* — parts being flung all over the place. As kind of a foresight of the Iran-Iraq War I had little children being used to clear mine fields. I just unleashed everything.

When you jump over to the syndicated shows there's considerably more freedom, though on G.I. JOE we're not allowed to kill anybody. We're allowed to hurt people. We've had characters break legs, be knocked into comas, be burned, be cut — but we've never been allowed to kill anybody in the show. I personally think the kids see right through this and they assume that when a tank gets hit everybody inside it gets incinerated.

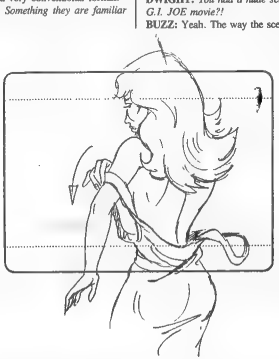
There is a certain problem — and I will concede this — with the toy-type film and TV show tie-ins. Whereas they do allow considerably more freedom than the networks, all the toy companies are interested in is that it sells the product. They obviously don't want to go out and blatantly offend anybody, but they don't care whether people like it or not. And the problem there is that too often they're not willing to experiment or take a risk with something different and new. They want to go with a very conventional format.

DWIGHT: *Something they are familiar with?*

BUZZ: Yeah. Essentially, there's, like, one story for the little kids, which is the nice people are being threatened by the big blue meanie and they have to go and make the big blue meanie stop. They go for very, very standard things. Even the G.I. JOE movie that we're doing, while it's going to be visually very spectacular and while we do get a lot of depth of character and whatnot in it, as far as the format goes it's not experimentally different. It follows a very basic action-adventure format. It's done well, if I say so myself, but there's no experimenting with form, with depth, with complexity. We had our nude scene taken out of it.

DWIGHT: *You had a nude scene in the G.I. JOE movie?!*

BUZZ: Yeah. The way the scene played



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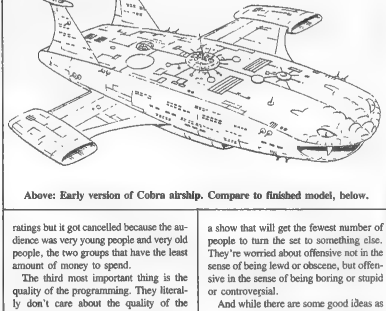
YEG, YES! I THINK I AM HURT. I'M SURE OF IT! GET ME TO A HOSPITAL.

"I LOVE LUCY was a breakthrough."

is . . . this beautiful blonde airhead is driving through the woods and she pulls up to this lake and it's all very pastoral, and she gets out of the car, kicks her sandals off, takes her hat off, and she slips off her sundress. She's standing on the edge of this lake and . . . you have a skinny-dip scene. She wasn't really nude but topless, and it was storyboarded in such a way that you never saw her nipples. She was topless but you never saw anything. It got all the way to the storyboard page and then somebody at either Sunbow or Hasbro — I think it was Hasbro — got cold feet, so now she keeps a bra on. They weren't willing to take that little extra chance. They are far more comfortable with something that has been done before than they are with something that hasn't been done before, and considering that they want these things to promote toys and merchandise maybe it's unfair to expect them to take risks. But you wish somebody would take the risk.

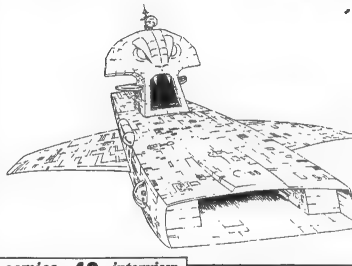
The main difference between the networks and the syndicators is this: The networks view programs of only tertiary importance. The first most important thing is their profit margin — that they make the most money possible, the largest possible profit off of their advertising time. That's what makes it or breaks it. You can win Emmys, the Nobel Prize — if you didn't make a profit then you're out on your ass. The next thing they're interested in is ratings and demographics, which enable them to charge the most money for air time. For instance, THE COSBY SHOW is very hot because it appeals to a very wide spectrum of people — young, old, black, white. It covers a very large audience and it's very popular. If you advertise a product on THE COSBY SHOW you're hitting at least a third of the people in the United States, so it becomes very valuable. Conversely, you have a show like SPENSER: FOR HIRE where the demographics show that the audience isn't likely to go out and buy some candy or a light beer but they will buy cameras. The demographics are different and it depends a lot on the demographics. Golf, for instance, doesn't have very high ratings, but the one thing they found out — which is absolutely phenomenal — is that the people who watch golf will buy anything. You advertise something during a golf tournament and it gets bought up. It's just like, "Okay, I'll go out and get one." So, even though golf tournaments don't do very well as far as ratings go, it's very valuable time to advertisers. That's why there are so many golf tournaments and that's why the money's so high. But there was one show on the air a few years ago, I forget the name of it, that had great ratings but it got cancelled because the audience was very young people and very old people, the two groups that have the least amount of money to spend.



Above: Early version of Cobra airship. Compare to finished model, below.

The third most important thing is the quality of the programming. They literally don't care about the quality of the programming as long as the correct demographics come in. If you went to them and said, "We've got a show called DUSTIN HOFFMAN'S PLAYHOUSE; **Dustin Hoffman** is going to get all of his really great actor friends and they're going to do one classic American play every week." — and somebody else says, "Yeah, but instead of doing that we can put on topless cheerleaders and get twice the demographics." — it doesn't take a genius to figure out which show is getting on the air. They pay a lot of lip service to quality, but what they're really interested in is what has been called the least objectionable programming: a show that will get the fewest number of people to turn the set to something else. They're worried about offensive not in the sense of being lewd or obscene, but offensive in the sense of being boring or stupid or controversial.

And while there are some good ideas as far as least objectionable programming goes — you obviously don't want to put on a really dull, stupid, boring show — at the same time it's limiting. For a long time television was *very* limited in the subjects they could tackle. They were afraid, for example, that people would be offended if they dealt with pregnancy, so for a long time you just didn't mention pregnancy. Then **Lucille Ball** got pregnant and they couldn't stop production of I LOVE LUCY, so they had to say that Lucy was going to have a baby. They said she was expecting. They still couldn't say pregnant, but I LOVE LUCY was a breakthrough show because



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"You remember Stallone's COBRA as a joke."

it did have to deal with a pregnancy. They never bothered to explain how Lucy got pregnant. . . *(Laughter.)*

There used to be some good action-adventure shows on the networks. JONNY QUEST is the classic that everybody remembers.

DWIGHT: *They're talking about bringing that back.*

BUZZ: It is coming back in syndication. But JONNY QUEST was not violent in the sense of people getting horribly tortured or murdered or stuff like that — yet it didn't take a genius to figure out that some of these people were getting killed in some of those episodes. There was a very good feeling about the show in that there was nothing mean-spirited about it. It was a lot like an American version of TIN-TIN. The violence, it's just done. It's a part of the story. No big deal is made about it. It was the tone.

Then there was this whole big thing back in the late '60s or early '70s where they got on this thing about what they called gratuitous violence. At first you'd say you can't argue with that. Why have gratuitous violence in a movie? Why have somebody get killed just for the sake of getting the audience excited? But the argument against gratuitous violence is the same argument against gratuitous comedy and against gratuitous sex and against gratuitous song-and-dance.

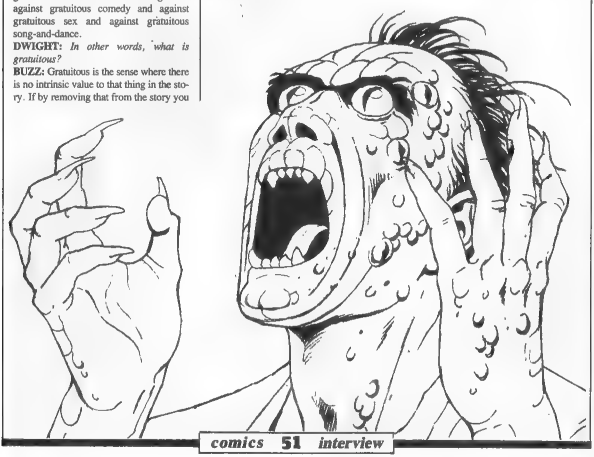
DWIGHT: *In other words, what is gratuitous?*

BUZZ: Gratuitous is the sense where there is no intrinsic value to that thing in the story. If by removing that from the story you don't affect the telling of the story, then it's gratuitous. I'll give you a great example, 'cause this is something they do on MIAMI VICE a lot: the opening segment doesn't have anything else to do with the show. The James Bond movies are the same way — the opening segment really doesn't have anything to do with the body of the story.

DWIGHT: *No. It's a vignette that is complete unto itself.*

BUZZ: In most of the Bond movies it is. In a few of them it ties in very tightly and actually sets the stage for what happens later. There's a lot of MGM musicals which have gratuitous song-and-dance numbers where people just start singing to put something into the movie. Porno films have gratuitous sex. There's no real reason for it except that it's a porno movie. But when you start arguing with people about what is and is not gratuitous — people who are not creative can't understnad this. . .

Let's take a good example: DIRTY HARRY. You look at DIRTY HARRY and you say, "Gosh this is a really violent film. Why does it have to be this violent? Why do we have to start with this killer shooting thus beautiful young girl?" You have to see that he is a ruthless son of a bitch who would kill an innocent young girl to get what he wants. It had to be done in order for the audience to appreciate that. "Well, Dirty Harry shoots three guys in the robbery at the beginning that really doesn't have anything to do with the rest of the movie." Well, plotwise it doesn't, but it advances Dirty Harry's character. Everybody's been talking about Dirty Harry and what a bad-ass son of a bitch he is. We have to see Dirty Harry *be* a bad-ass son of a bitch before we can appreciate it. So at this point we understand that we've got a very dangerous son of a bitch psychotic killer and a real bad-ass son of a bitch cop, and now the chess game begins. Now these guys are playing against each other, and you spend a lot of the time — in this really violent film — waiting for the rest of the violence to happen. That's the reason you remember it as a violent film. Then you watch **Stallones** COBRA and people start being blown away left and right. None of it makes any sense. None of it adds up. None of it is comprehensible. When you start to think about it you realize there's no connection. You remember COBRA as a joke, and it's a much more violent film than DIRTY HARRY.



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"You have to see FANTASIA several times."

DWIGHT: *Why, since there is so much about it that's limiting, do you stay in animation?*

BUZZ: One of the things that keeps me in animation — besides the obvious, that I've not broken out yet — is the fact that there is a great deal of potential. When I worked at TMS I saw several of the features that they had done in Japan; these are some of the funniest, most light-hearted, enjoyable adventures you could ever hope to see. Anybody who's ever seen those films is just blown away. They're just incredible because they can cover so much territory. They can be serious. They can be comic. They can simultaneously be fanciful and very realistic and have a very strong emotional core. There are some absolutely incredible Japanese animated features. The French have done a number of animated films that were very well done. There's been some good English features.

The possibilities, what you can do in animation . . . there is an awful lot that *can* be done. There's tremendous amounts of room for work to be done. One of the few videotapes I actually went out and bought is GALAXY EXPRESS, which is Japanese animated science-fiction about a train that travels through space. You do that in live-action and you get hooted off the screen, but you'll accept it in a cartoon. You can create a world of surrealism. You can have characters doing things where the entire artistic thrust of the story is pushed one degree beyond. You can do things with animation that could not possibly be duplicated in any other set of circumstances.

Take FANTASIA. There is no music video in the world that is ever going to be able to compete with FANTASIA. You look at FANTASIA and you realize that there are characters in the foreground that are doing something where they're carrying on, like, the main melody, but in the background there are other characters doing stuff that reflects the background melody — and all of a sudden you're just blown away because here is something that is using several different layers, several different levels, to convey the information across. You have to see FANTASIA several times before you can really begin to understand it.

There is just such an *incredible* amount of stuff that can be done with animation . . . but unfortunately for the United States there is this attitude — and television did a lot to create this — that cartoons are for kids and, as a result, that they can't carry serious stories and can't be about serious subjects. The same thing applies to comic books. In Europe and in Asia comic books are considered just as valid an art-

form as the novel or the oil painting. Here in the United States they're still junk, trash, and most people wouldn't be caught dead reading a comic book.

DWIGHT: *It's starting to change, though.*

BUZZ: But we're nowhere near the set of circumstances where if a kid were to go into a book store and be given the choice between a copy of HUCKLEBERRY FINN or an ADVENTURE OF TIN-TIN that either choice would be just as good as the other. It's the same thing with animation.

There's an incredible amount of good stuff that can be done in animation, on networks, in syndication, theatrically, but the only way it's going to improve is if people let the producers and the distributors and whatnot know that they appreciate it. As long as animation is perceived of as kid stuff then you're not going to get anything but kid stuff.

Revealed at last: The Secret of the "Buzz-Bomb."

Photos: Yang-Mi Dixon

"I'm moving my hand around with an ink tool

JOE RUBINSTEIN

Last issue, Joe revealed why he loves to kiss Dick Giordano on the mouth, the "rush" he got handling Russ Heath's magic brush, the women he meets at conventions and other "True Confessions."

This month, Joe talks about the Philippino inkers, Klaus Janson's influence, his running argument with Bill Sienkiewicz, why he hates the idea of a 9-to-5 job, his feelings about the business side of comics, tired old pros, and (as if we need to tell you) more!

And, as I said, I think for instance the Phillipinos, who are an incredible group of artists who are terribly technically skilled — I think they don't give anybody any credence in having a different style. I think **Walt Simonson** is so individual that I suspect they look at Walt and go, "Oh, he can't draw." Maybe Walt can't draw the way that **John Buscema** draws, but he produces a powerful image, and a good comic book as far as I'm concerned, and they don't see the other side. Where somebody like **Mike Golden**, who is very stylized, they would say, "Well, this doesn't look like what I've been studying for the past forty years, it's not based on **Hal Foster**'s work." I just think they're not willing to give other artists the right to be different than themselves. As I said, studying with Dick, when he inked **Dick Dillin**, he did it much differently than **Neal Adams**, and I'd ask him, "I notice you didn't put the same lines in here," and he said, "It's not the same artist. Don't look at it as the same problem every time." As an example, I have guys come up to me at Marvel and say, "Gee, I really like the way you do shoulders. How do you do shoulders?" And my response is, "You're nuts!" There isn't a way to do shoulders, and there isn't a way to do cheekbones. It's drawing, and it's rendering, and it's style, and how you get the thing to look right. But people seem to think there is one easy lesson for doing faces, and one for dress, and so on. You look at somebody like **Klaus Janson**. I think Klaus has been doing the very best inking in the business for years now, and he's very innovative and imaginative, and he's invented a lot of the stuff that all of us have adopted as our cliches, and that's what an inker should be — somebody who is constantly looking for an interesting way to do something and not the same old way.

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CHRIS: *Springboard — taking into consideration the writers, artists, colorists — what's the percentage of technicians versus artists in this business?*

JOE: When you say artists, do you mean the most creative ones?

CHRIS: *Not the most creative ones — they can be Godawful in your opinion, but at least they are trying to be an artist — an interpreter of their emotion, rather than a salesman.*

JOE: See, that goes back to something I've been arguing with **Bill Sienkiewicz** about for a long time. Bill wants an emotion in his work, and he's always looking for an innovative way to say it. But as I've told him, I think his stuff too often looks like "Look Ma, no hands!" It seems to be so geared on looking spontaneous and different than comic books, that it for-

in it, and he gives me 25 bucks. What a scam!"

gets that it *is* a comic book. He looks at my inking and says, "You know, it's very predictable, and it's all been done before," to which I say, "It's *Spider-Man*, it's *comic books*." It should look a certain way. I don't think that if I took over — well, if they invented a new book that didn't have an established look, then that's okay — but I think there's a certain expectation of Spider-Man. I think in this business, if you don't keep looking for a new way of doing it, you're pretty much dead. It's very boring after a while, because comic books — collectors aside — is a throwaway art. You buy it, throw it away, the next issue comes out, and the next. Eventually, it feels like you've been working on the same issue for years, and it all keeps coming out. As an inker, I have to keep looking for something to keep me interested from day to day. I think for writers it's probably a lot easier because they have to come up with new ideas. Pencillers are

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PARTICLE Dreams

Some things are dangerous, y'know?

"Comic books is a throwaway art."

such a part of the collaboration that they have to evolve to keep alive. Inkers — it's very interesting for me — late at night, when you're too tired to think, you can still ink. You can sit there and run through a job and do all of Captain America's shields, or all the wings on Flash's head or whatever. As an inker you can just turn off your thinking process and become mechanical. And it's dangerous, and it leads to — I don't know, early suicide. *(Laughter.)* As far as the business is structured, people want good, but they also want it on time, and they would like it sooner, if at all possible. You have to pay bills like anybody else, you know that you would like to spend another two days on this job, but you can't get your voucher in and you won't get paid in time to pay off your mortgage, so you had just better get it in. It is a business and you have to think of it that way. Luckily, now that comic books' pay royalties, supposedly the better writers and artists are being rewarded for being saleable and the discerning public recognizes that "Oh, he's a good artist or writer, I guess I'll buy him this week," and then **Frank Miller** decides that he doesn't have to do DAREDEVIL every month — that he can take off, think about RONIN, structure RONIN, and make enough money off it to take his time on it. That's a nice bonus that the industry is giving people now.

CHRIS: *When you ink, does it vary from artist to artist how long it takes you to figure out the light source?*

JOE: It depends, comics are either pencilled very tightly, where all the details are put in, or they are layouts, with a sketchy or not- too-sketchy indication of what is going on. So when you're given a tight pencil you have no choice — there is the light source. With layouts, you have a lot more to do with the black placement on the page, and the lighting and so forth. Matter of fact, when I work on layouts, I sort of get dizzy, because there are so many variables going on that I keep wondering which ones to choose from. Generally, the light source is pretty much there. Another thing — editors will say, "I've got this job that I want you to ink, and the pencils are real tight, don't worry about it." Yeah, but are they right? Meaning the guy may have put down every detail, and put it down beautifully and accurately, but the actual drawing might be a mile off, so what good is it to you — you still have to get rid of it, where someone like **Ron Frenz**, his stuff is looser than a **John Byrne** or whoever, but his pencils are on the money. I never have to fix Ron's drawing, except sometimes he makes faces too long, but that's his trip.

© 1986 Will Eisner

Joe did this Will Eisner forgery to win a bet. The guy never paid off.

CHRIS: *A large part of comic books, obviously since we've been talking about it so much, is the business end of things. How much does that interfere, if at all? Do you find pressure to do things a certain way? Do you find it more at certain companies?*

JOE: You know, I got into comic books because I love comic books. What a wonderful life — to do comic books and make other children happy by reading your stories, and maybe give yourself some sense of fulfillment by having done a good product.

CHRIS: *Illusion shatterment number seven.*

JOE: Well, yeah. I never worked a day in my life — no, that's not true. I spent one day selling popcorn in Prospect Park, and I said, "Geez, this sucks. I don't want to work for a living!" *(Laughter.)* And I've never had to be anyplace at nine o'clock, and leave at five and have lunch at twelve. I sit at home all day and work. I go to see smash movies Wednesday afternoon at three when nobody else is there — it's a real interesting life. But if you want to get into comics — nobody got into comics for money, because there wasn't any money until recently. I want to think that everybody that's in comics is in comics for the love of it, and I get tired of these people — generally the business types, I'm not talking about editors or assistant editors or anything like that — who could be selling toilet paper. As a

"Older artists seem jaded. They don't care. It's

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The heads of Hydra plus 1. Pencils of the Marvel villains by Mike Zeck.

matter of fact, they probably are selling toilet paper. They don't know who's good or bad — "I don't read these things, I give them to my grandchildren." At Marvel Comics, the tenth floor is the "creative types," upstairs is the business people, and in effect it is the tail wagging the dog. If upstairs had its way, every issue of X-MEN would be a double-sized issue, whoever died in the process really wouldn't matter to them. It's like, "The X-MEN sells real well, let's do it sixteen times a year." I would like to think that everybody involved in comic books is excited about the fact that they're doing comic books, and I hate running into the old pros who don't care anymore, who feel trapped, who couldn't care less and haven't read a comic in thirty-two years. It's like, "For God's sake, go sell used cars then." Also, when it's a disenchanted penciller or an apathetic inker, then it hurts somebody else, because if some guy has done a beautiful pencil job, and they give it to "old hack inker number twelve," and he butchers it, well it goes beyond saying "Poor inker, maybe he shouldn't be doing this." Or you're a new writer and you've got this great idea for a story, and they buy it, and they give to somebody who hates comics, but just draws them for the money, and he doesn't draw half of what you wanted him to, or because it took too much time and he can't make a living at it, or he draws it as boringly as he thinks about comic books. He draws it dull because comic books are dull to him and he doesn't care anymore. As I said, you can make a good living at comics, but up until a few years ago, nobody got into it for the living. The big difference between the modern day artist and writers and the golden age artists and writers is — the golden age artists were guys who fell into comics and said, "I really want to be an illustrator, or do SATURDAY EVENING POST covers, but I'll do comic books for the moment." Now, I guess since the Seventies, with the re-emergence of comics, and the new Batman and everything, it's like "Oh, all I ever wanted to be was a comic-book artist," and that's great, but unfortunately they set their goals too low, and *all* they want to be is a comic-book artist. Well, you know, the first day they give you a script to draw a story, you're a comic-book artist, so where have you gone with your goals? You have to keep setting your goals higher and higher or you will in effect wither on the vine in comic books. I think of myself as fortunate bcause I want to be a good painter, and that is a goal that will probably take the rest of my life. I also want to be a very good inker, and I think I'm a good inker now, and there's a lot to shoot for. But don't, for any reason, get into comic books to make a living. It's nice that they pay you to sit at home and draw pictures — it's like stealing to sit at home and draw pictures. You could be out there digging a ditch or working at a hot dog stand or whatever. And all you have to do is sit at home, and yet it astonishes me — every time I go to a convention — that I do inking at conventions. **John Byrne** or **Paul Smith** or whoever has come through town and done a pencil drawing, and it's like my motto, "Pencil fades, but ink is forever." I've been at cons where a guy will say, "How much money do you want to ink this drawing?" And I'll say, "Twenty bucks," and he'll say, "That's too much." And the same guy will come back to me a year later and say, "I didn't know this drawing would fade, could you salvage it for me?" And I say, "Okay, but now it's twenty-five dollars because you gave me a hard time." *(Laughter.)* So I come to these cons, and I'm moving my hand around with an ink tool in it, and I hand it to him and he gives me twenty-five bucks. What a scam! Gee!

CHRIS: *You could ruin it for everybody, you better be careful!*

JOE: There have been cons where I have made a lot of money, and I felt, "If it's this easy, I might as well spend it as fast as I got it." On the other hand, **Jim Shooter** has told me he finds the idea of charging your fans, your public, money for your product very distasteful. He just doesn't like it. I told him a story once — I was at a convention — let me digress for a minute: When I was at my first con, there was a big, beauti-

'I fooled 'em this week, gimme my check!"

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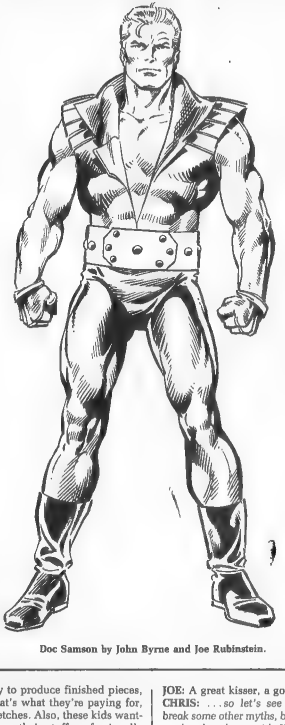
ful piece of artwork by **Wally Wood**, who was one of my idols at the time, probably still is. And I said, "How much is it?" I had a dollar thirty-two cents in my pocket. And he said it was two hundred dollars. If I could have killed my Mother and sold her for meat, I would have done it to get that drawing (laughter), because it was my own personal unique piece of **Wally Wood** that I could hold. So I went to a convention as a professional, and this kid walks up to me and very shyly says, "Would you ink one of my drawings?" And I said I would. He asked how much, and I said it would be five bucks for a head shot. So he turned to his friend and said, "Give me five bucks," and his friend said, "No! I want to buy comics with this money." The first kid said, "Are you crazy, you can do that anytime, give me five bucks." So the second kid, being the wheeler dealer that he was, said, "Four," and I said, "Forget it" — so the first kid finally managed to get the money, and he scrambled around for a piece of paper, did a drawing of Thor, and suddenly the con organizer said that I had to be on a panel, so I picked up my brush and inked it as fast as I could, and I fixed it a little bit, and asked him what he thought, and the kid was gleaming, and he held it to his breast, and it was wonderful. Five bucks isn't going to pay off the farm, but I really think that I made that kid's day, and that was very nice, so that's where the money comes in.

CHRIS: *Well, I think it's completely justified. I know why Frank Frazetta doesn't let anything get out. He did a doodle on a napkin for someone who bothered him while he was eating, and he was still at the point where he was nice enough to do it, and he turned out a damn nice sketch on the paper napkin, because it was the only paper there, got finished eating, went back into the ballroom, and saw it on sale for sixty dollars.*

JOE: You go to parties, and you might ask a doctor for advice, but really, it's their job that you're asking them to do, and they're paid to do it. So I don't find anything particularly unreasonable, especially since I found out that I filled a vacuum at cons that I didn't know existed. Where most people bring magic markers and Pentels and do sketches, I come with a bottle of ink and all the tools I use to ink with and I sit down and try to produce finished pieces, and that's what they're paying for, not sketches. Also, these kids wanted to see their stuff professionally inked and I was there. And it was also nice to know that they got one of their wishes filled.

CHRIS: *That's something I didn't know happened. Now we've got a lot of glowing things about Giordano . . .*



Doc Samson by John Byrne and Joe Rubinstein.

JOE: *A great kisser, a good dancer.*

CHRIS: *. . . so let's see if we can break some other myths, because you work a lot closer with Jim Shooter these days than with Dick Giordano, and there's a lot of bad flak about Jim, and I can't believe it's all true. Do you want to either prove it, or denounce it?*

JOE: I was at DC one day, and I went

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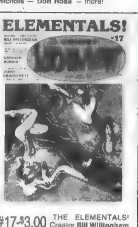

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comics interview

"When you're too tired to think, you can still ink."

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in to see Dick, walked in, and kissed him right on the mouth. **Judith Hunt** was standing there, and Dick said, "Joe would rather work for DC than for Marvel, but he can't afford to work for us because he makes more at Marvel — though he likes to kiss me, he can't reach **Jim Shooter**." And I said, "I can reach Jim as high as he wants me to." *(Laughter.)* But Jim is one of my best friends and I have tremendous respect for him. I know a lot of the inside stuff from all sources, because I'm known as a gadfly, I am nosey, I ask people what the latest rumor is, and I know Jim's personal life, and what would have broken lesser men, Jim put up with. Besides the fact that everybody is bitching, "Marvel screwed me over," and "Who is Marvel but the personification, **Jim Shooter**," and hearsay and so on. **Jim Shooter** is an intelligent man, he cares — he has personally tripled and quadrupled people's incomes by giving them exclusive contracts, and by figuring how to sell Marvel comics well. The worst thing I think you can say about Jim is that he's insulting people when he does. Meaning, he'll say something like, "Gee, you don't sweat much for a fat girl," *(laughter)* and not understand why she took it wrong, because he was sure he complimented her. I have seen some real lowlife things said about Jim, and he will say, "Well, look who it's coming from," and then just sluff it off — he does not hold grudges. One thing that is a constant criticism of Jim, is the homogenous look that Marvel comics are getting because Jim is involved. I think that's true to a certain extent. But the fact is, he believes a comic book should look a certain way, and be read a certain way. For instance, he believes you should function under the premise that all readers are intelligent and totally uninformed. Meaning, if a kid picks up SPIDER-MAN for the first time, you had better know darn well that Peter Parker is Spider-Man, that he has these powers, that he's a good guy. A lot of people will just enter into the story and they think it's boring to recap, because everybody's been reading. Well, everybody hasn't if this is their first time out. Beyond that, they say he limits the creativity of the penciller. He won't allow us to do inset panels or splashes or God knows what else. Jim does have a definite

concept of what a good-looking page should be. But within those parameters exists **Byrne** and **Austin, Colan** and **Palmer, John Buscema** and **Ernie Chan**, also **Steve Ditko**, and **Jack Kirby**, and **Craig Russell**, and **Berni Wrightson**, who is doing a Spider-Man job for us. If I were made God — and we do look alike *(laughter)* — and I said that all art had to look a certain way, I'd do it, because I believe there is a certain criteria for good work. I don't think you can fault a guy for trying to impose what he thinks is right on the business he's in. Another good thing is — X-MEN sells beautifully, another book doesn't. He will work equally hard on both books trying to make them better. People will say that if something isn't broken, don't fix it. But Jim firmly believes that if something sells well, and if you make it better, it will sell better. And that's

Joe inks something a little different. The NIGHTCRAWLER Limited Series by Dave Cockrum.

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"There are a lot of egos rubbing against each other."

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YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE A NEWSMAN, REMEMBER? YOU HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PEOPLE!
DON'T THEY HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON OUT THERE?!

Joe is proud of his work on J. Jonah Jameson's face. Full-size reproduction of this panel from AMAZING SPIDER-MAN penciled by Ron Frenz.

what it comes down to — that he wants quality, and he works real hard at it, and he gets a lot of flak. Basically, there are a lot of egos rubbing against each other in this industry. Some of it is totally uncalled for, and Jim does not deserve that malicious stuff said about him. **Jim Starlin** is a friend of mine, and he was in negotiation with Marvel for the DEATH OF CAPTAIN MARVEL graphic novel. He was doing the negotiations with **Shooter**, So **Starlin** would come to me and say, "I've heard a lot about **Shooter** and I'm really wary of him." and as the weeks progressed, I asked **Starlin** what he thought of **Shooter**, and he said, "He's not such a bad guy," and weeks on he said, "Gee, he's really a good guy." And it got to the point where **Shooter** and **Starlin** united against the company to get **Starlin** the best possible deal. That is the kind of guy he is. People will walk in and hear these horror stories, but if you just allow yourself to listen to the man, and not be swayed by other people's opinions, I think you will find yourself a real friend at Marvel Comics.

CHRIS: *Who do you want to ink that you haven't?*

JOE: Jose Luis Garcia Lopez.

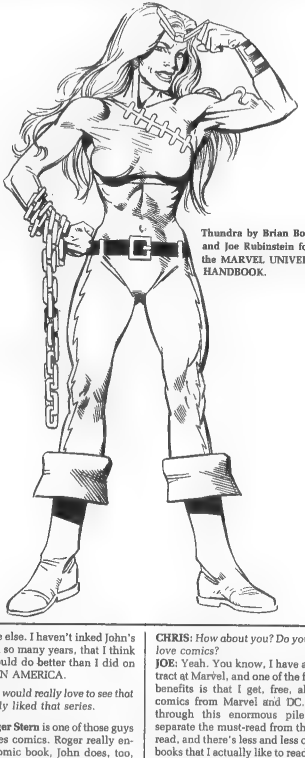
CHRIS: *Is that it, or is he the main one? You've inked a lot of people.*

JOE: I have inked everyone. Unless it's the newest guy, or the oldest, deadest guy. I have inked 164 different people, and **Garcia Lopez** draws so well, that — it might be boring once I actually go about doing it, but I really lust after him. I would love to ink **Kevin Nowlan**, and **Barry Windsor-Smith** — when I saw the X-MEN that Terry did, I looked at it and said, "You know, if I had worked twice as hard as Terry did on that issue, I would have done half as good a job as he pulled off." It was an astonishingly good-looking job. I inked a little bit of **Berni Wrightson** for a fan once, and I'd love to do more. I've been trying to get Berni to work on MARVEL UNIVERSE. And I'm sure that after the interview I'll think of some more guys that I'm dying to do.

CHRIS: *Who have you done that you can't get enough of? Or who do you do all the time that you love to do?*

JOE: People come up to me at cons and tell me how much they liked the CAPTAIN AMERICA that I did with **Byrne** and **Stern**, and I was very proud of those; they were a good-reading comic book. I want to be on something people will say, "That's quality," besides saying, "Look at the pretty pictures." I was very happy with WOLVERINE, I was very happy with CAPTAIN AMERICA. I'm very happy with SPIDER-MAN — I think it's a good-looking comic book, a good-reading comic book. I would like to do another series with **John Byrne**, it just never happens. I wanted to do the SHE-HULK graphic novel, but it was promised to

"Once people are tired of looking at the actual



Thundra by Brian Bolland and Joe Rubinstein for the MARVEL UNIVERSE HANDBOOK.

someone else. I haven't inked John's pages in so many years, that I think that I could do better than I did on CAPTAIN AMERICA.

CHRIS: *I would really love to see that — I really liked that series.*

JOE: Roger Stern is one of those guys who loves comics. Roger really enjoys a comic book, John does, too, and it's a lot different than the guy who walks in and says, "Okay, what am I going to write this week for a living?" There are several of those.

CHRIS: *How about you? Do you still love comics?*

JOE: Yeah. You know, I have a contract at Marvel, and one of the fringe benefits is that I get, free, all the comics from Marvel and DC. I go through this enormous pile and separate the must-read from the no-read, and there's less and less comic books that I actually like to read. But there are the rare exceptions like SWAMP THING, which I can't wait for to come in my package — I have to buy it as soon as I see it on the stands. The same thing happened when **Frank Miller** was doing DAREDEVIL. I'm very disappointed when I talk to people who don't read any comic except the one they are working on, because they sort of have to, and that's really sad. I don't know if I would be reading them as much if I didn't work on them for a living, but they are about the only thing that you can read on the subway and concentrate on at the same time. Comic books are entertainment, and I think the structure of this industry — everything is too serious. Everybody is looking over everybody else's back, everybody's weighing everybody's work, everybody is picking at some mistake in continuity — that forty-two years ago, in issue twelve, he said this, so he couldn't say it this time out. Let me segue into something as far as pressure goes: I had a burnout about five or six years ago — I just couldn't function anymore, because I was going through such a strain, so I went off and did commercial art for a while because, believe it or not, it wasn't as bad as producing comic books day in and day out. I know of several artists — young guys, twenty-five, twenty-six years old, who had burnouts, and I don't know if they had burnouts in the Forties; I don't know if **George Evans**, for example, had a breakdown in the Fifties. I think it's gotten to the point where it's not fun for most people, it's a business — people are watching the sales, people are badgering you, there's too much money involved. **Walt Simonson** brought fun back to THOR. **Alan Moore** brought fun back to comics by sort of saying, "This has all been done before," meaning the MARVELMAN strip in WARRIOR — if anybody hasn't read it yet, I think it's beautiful, brilliant stuff. It's just that it's a business, and everybody thinks of it as a business, and that's really too bad, because it's funny books, and they should be fun to do.

CHRIS: *You just mentioned that you're under contract to Marvel. If that's the case, why did we see you doing a job for DC?*

JOE: I've not left Marvel Comics. Somebody said, "I see you're **real** mad at Marvel and you're going to work for DC." **Don Newton** was a friend of mine for a lot of years. We only met once, at the San Diego convention, but we corresponded, and

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art jobs — they can look for Bullwinkle."

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called each other, and then Don died. I called up **Dick Giordano, Roy Thomas** and **Jim Shooter**, and asked everybody if I could please ink Don's last job. Don had asked me half-jokingly several times, "Why don't you leave Marvel and go ink my BATMAN?" to which I would say, "Why don't you leave DC and do something here?" So I decided I wanted to, in effect, say goodbye to Don. I worked with **Wally Wood**, and Woody died, and **Gene Day** was someone I knew, a sweet, lovely man, and he died, and I could never quite close the book on either of them. And so with Don, I thought it would be a way of sort of working through the grief. And I'll tell you, I never, ever want to ink a dead man's job again, because I'll be inking this beautiful little face, and suddenly it will hit me that it's never going to happen again — that is the last time that beautiful face will be drawn, or I'd be thinking about something that Don did, and I'd reach for the phone to call him up, and of course, I'd suddenly realize what I was doing. An interesting aside, **Mike Grell** called me up one day to say hello, and he said, "What are you doing?" and I said, "I'm inking **Don Newton's** last job," and he said, "Listen, if I ever die in the middle of a job, I'd like to finish it up for me." I thought, "This is not a precedent I want to set." It's like being the **Georgie Jessel** of inkers. *(Laughter.)* That's why I did Don's job. I did the SUPERMAN job because I grew up reading **Curt Swan's** Superman, and loving every minute of it, and I think **Curt Swan** is a great artist that people pass by all the time because he did SUPERMAN. **Jim Shooter** was nice enough, being as he is Polish, to give me dispensation *(laughter)*, and let me do the Superman job, and I had more fun on that than I've had in years. But yes, I'm back at Marvel, and that's why.

CHRIS: *Without naming the whys — "I love the writing on this, and the art on that" — what are your favorite comics, besides SWAMP THING?*

JOE: MARVELMAN, I like PRESS-BUTTON! & LASER ERASER, NEXUS, THOR — I like SPIDER-MAN. Honest to God, I wouldn't kid you. If I thought I was on a dog book, I'd tell you, and I think that SPIDER-MAN is good-old-fashioned sock-'em comic books, and I read it, too. I like AVENGERS, it's picking up — it had a draggy period for a while — I like FANTASTIC FOUR quite a bit, and I expected to like the HULK once John took it over. That's about it.

CHRIS: *You can't have but so many favorites.*

JOE: And, after all, what makes the good stuff stand out? All the garbage around it. Most TV is bad, most movies are bad, and most music is bad . . . Oh, before I foget, I have this very talented assistant who is getting pencilling and inking work on his own named **Kyle Baker**. Every job that Kyle assists me on, he sneaks Bullwinkle in somewhere. So people can spend their time looking at SPIDER-MAN and trying to find Bullwinkle on the pages. He's on book covers, in windows, in picture frames, and in audiences. So once people are tired of looking at the actual art jobs, they can look for Bullwinkle.

The Enchantress by Walt Simonson and and Joe Rubinstein for the MARVEL UNIVERSE HANDBOOK.

LAST WORD

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WANTED: BISSETTE'S OPINION OF THE SWAMP THING MOVIE

Dear COMICS INTERVIEW,

I am writing in response to issue #32, greatly admired the interview with **Stephen Bissette** and enjoyed reading his opinions of many movies. However, **Wes Craven** was not mentioned. Neither was his 1982 film SWAMPTHING. I am very interested in learning **Bissette's** opinion of the only movie of our favorite swamp creature. Also, would like some information on Eclipse's "ST Movie Portfolio" of 1983, which was mentioned in your portfolio section. How can I get my hands on it? About your back issues: Have you ever had an interview with **Marty Pasko**? If so, which issue?

Federico Hewson
344 Serrano Dr.
San Francisco, CA 94132

Yes, Federico, we recently talked to Marty Pasko in the pages of COMICS INTERVIEW #34 — available for the same price as our other back issues, but in rather short supply, as so many of them are. Hope it's not sold out by the time you read this!

— DAK

INTERNATIONAL INVITATION!

Dear David:

Starting with the next issue, EUROPEAN CARTOONIST will change its title to THE CARTOONIST and open its pages also to the American artists.

This magazine which aims to be a vehicle of promotion for the comics and artists of the whole world, will increase the number of pages from 52 to 68 and will also feature a colour insert (8 inside pages, plus the 4 pages of the cover).

The text will be published in three languages, in this way: for instance, if the original text is in English, it will be printed in 8-point typesize, while the translations in French and Italian will be in a smaller point size. The original text will always have greater space.

Also, the comic strips will be printed in the original version, with translations on one side. Certainly, this should involve the *aficionados* and readers of many countries.

This letter is an open invitation for anyone in your country to become a contributor. Every artist and author can have at disposal 10 or 20 pages to use just as he wants — for instance, for articles or presentations of new characters, sketches, layouts and, obviously, photographs. Besides this, we may feature short comic stories, which can be chosen directly by you. If there is something of your old or new artwork realized for some syndicate, you can put me in contact with the sales department.

We are also looking for articles regarding authors and characters, news and interviews with artists and writers, and anything else which you think might be interesting.

If anyone is interested in this initiative, please get in contact with me.

Nino Bernazzali
CARTOONIST MAGAZINE
Via Sabotino, 10
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Geneva, ITALY
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NEXT ISSUE: Whether or not you've seen the HOWARD THE DUCK movie, be here when we ask STEVE GERBER some hard questions about his secret Marvel settlement — and talk to producer GLORIA KATZ about movies' most expensive mallard. Plus: Larrupin' LARRY HAMA talks about everything BUT G.I. Joaph — and writer J.M. DeMATTEIS talks about everything, period — all coming your way in COMICS INTERVIEW #38! Ut, y'all.

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